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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	OFFERED—A LADY GARDENER	1
II	A MOTORIST COMES TO RUTHERWYKE	15
III	MARY COMES TO RUTHERWYKE	24
IV	THE GABRIEL BELL	40
V	THE MOURNER IN THE HOUSE	56
VI	THE OTHER WALKER IN THE GARDEN	67
VII	PASSION FLOWERS	81
VIII	THE MYSTERY OF MARY	100
IX	MARY'S LONG BLUE CLOAK	119
X	THE VOICE OF AN OLD FRIEND	134
XI	THE FIRST SITTING	155
XII	MONK CALLS AT THE WHITE COTTAGE	171
XIII	WHAT MARY DID	183
XIV	"WHY NOT?"	201
XV	THE SOUL OF THE LILIES	218
XVI	A TALK BY THE FOUNTAIN	234
XVII	MARY THE MOTHER	245
XVIII	THE HEM OF HER GARMENT	257
XIX	THIRTY SILENT YEARS	272
XX	CHERCHEZ LA FEMME	287
XXI	WITHOUT SPOT OF SIN	305
XXII	THE GREATER MEANING	321
XXIII	WHICH IS THE GATE?	337
XXIV	WHERE THE TREE FALLS	354
XXV	THE LAST LETTER	362
XXVI	A DEAD MAN'S DEED	368
XXVII	MARY'S GIRDLE	381
XXVIII	THE PILGRIM'S STORY	387
XXIX	GOOD-NIGHT	392

MARY

CHAPTER I

OFFERED—A LADY GARDENER

ARROW PENREATH heard his study door open, but did not look up. He kept his eyes riveted on the paper he was reading, and Porterton, the butler, felt the silent desire for solitude expressed by his master's manner.

At last a hesitating voice spoke diffidently—

"If you please, sir——"

The paper was flung down. It slipped to the ground and lay in an untidy heap on the hearthrug, while Arrow sat upright, with contracted eyebrows, as he muttered an impatient "Well, well?"

"Monk won't go away without seeing you, sir. He pleaded so hard, that he persuaded me at last to trouble you again. He talks wildly of injustice and says he has been ruined by some person who must have plotted his downfall for months. He begs you for one last word. He will not believe that your decision is final."

Arrow crushed the fallen newspaper under his heel. For a moment he stared into the deep crimson pit of the fire with unseeing eyes, asking himself why he, of all men, should be troubled by a domestic upheaval,

when such incidents were utterly antagonistic to his nature? He resented trouble as the enemy of elevated thought. He wanted to live always in a world of his own, to create a perfectly harmonious atmosphere, to beautify every emotion, shutting out the ugly sins of sordid mercenary natures. Vice was as repugnant to him as mud when the pure white snow merges its beauty in the grime of earth. Yet vice had crept to his very doors, had reigned in his garden of Eden, casting a cloud over the joyous days of spring.

"Very well, Porterton, show Monk in."

The words were spoken with a grudging disdain, clear, sharp, decisive. They conveyed the desire to get an unpleasant interview over with all possible speed.

"Yes, sir."

The butler retired with quick, noiseless steps; he admired yet feared his master. He was surprised that Monk dared present himself again before the man he had undoubtedly swindled. The fact of such persistency made Porterton wonder if it were possible injustice had been done.

He found the dismissed gardener waiting by an open door which led to a large conservatory. Monk's eyes sought for the answer with hungry interrogation.

"Yes," replied Porterton to the dumb appeal of that yearning glance. "The master will see you in his study, but from the look of him it is not much good your trying to talk him over. You ought to know him well enough for that. He has got his own ideas and isn't likely to change his mind."

Monk bowed his head, moving slowly in the direction of Arrow Penreath's room. He hesitated for a moment, with trembling fingers lightly touching the door handle. It seemed to the palpitating soul without that the man

who sat in judgment within those study walls would hear the wild beating of his heart and feel with what fury the blood coursed through the quivering veins of an accused servant. Some note of pity must surely answer to the throbbing of pulses, which quickened until their owner could scarcely bear the sensation of nervous dread and keen despair.

He entered the study with lowered eyes. All the fine language he intended using died upon his lips. His throat grew parched, his forehead moist. With difficulty he kept back his tears.

For a moment he feared speech would absolutely fail, then with an effort he stammered:

"It's all untrue. You can't believe, sir, that I am a thief, a swindler. There is devil's work in this, and I have been made the cat's-paw of a devil. I never robbed you of a farthing. Your interests were mine. I set such store by all your wishes, that I would sooner have cut off my right hand than do you an injury."

His voice shook with passion, the man's body swayed as he spoke, his hands were clenched with convulsive pressure. He breathed hard, and the sound of his panting was peculiarly distasteful to Arrow.

His master shrugged impatient shoulders and spoke sharply, weary of discussing a matter which had already been thrashed out.

"It is no use trying to justify yourself, Monk. I tell you I have proofs of your dishonesty. I discovered I was being swindled more than a fortnight ago, and subsequent investigations show me this double dealing has been going on for many months—possibly years. It takes time to discover a small leakage, and I relied on you absolutely, until my eyes were opened. You will leave my service as quickly as possible—and without a

character. I have said it before, I repeat it again now, and this is my final word."

The speaker turned his head away, that he might not see Monk's confusion. It was certainly difficult to believe that such an apparently excellent fellow should have fallen upon evil days and indulged the sordid vice of pilfering. At "Rutherwyke Place" the post of head gardener was an important one, for both Mr. and Mrs. Penreath were great beauty-lovers and took personal pride in the stately old-fashioned grounds. It was not a small matter that Monk could boast he had complete control of a show-place and worked in the service of a celebrated R.A. Now the rugged face of the gardener wore a dazed expression. He was pale, haggard, unnerved. He saw his words had no effect upon his master, could trace no look of sympathy or reassuring sign. From head to foot he grew cold as stone. Yet to move away at once, to go in silence, proved a physical impossibility. Again he returned doggedly to the attack.

"There's some mistake," he muttered—"some mistake. I have been blackened by an unknown enemy here, where I thought I was surrounded with friends."

His master made a sign to him to leave, enough had been said. In the face of glaring evidence, Monk's words sounded empty and unconvincing.

Still, the figure in the slate-colored suit hesitated, with a shy shuffling of feet and a glance of despair which traveled round the study walls.

"I know," he added, "appearances are against me. I know full well that another person has managed to throw the blame on innocent shoulders, getting me into such a tight corner that it really looks as if I were all you say. But even if you offered me another chance

now, sir, I wouldn't take it, to be under suspicion. I could not bear to look you in the eyes, with the knowledge you thought me a thief."

Mr. Penreath waved his hand in the direction of the door.

"That will do," he said, turning to a number of letters on the desk, which apparently demanded his immediate attention. "You are not offered another chance, and your supposition of an unknown enemy is a very unlikely one. We have talked of this matter quite long enough. I must ask you to go without further argument."

His voice sounded cold and hard, with a well-feigned lack of interest.

Monk turned a pair of reproachful gray eyes full upon his late master. He saw a man of medium height, in the prime of life, possessed by a certain restlessness, which had always seemed to the head gardener to express an ever-flowing current of genius and artistic endeavor. Certainly one who produced such world-famed pictures could not be expected to share the mild vegetable temperament of everyday nonentities. Fires of ambition and high endeavor burned within that form of ordinary build, showing their light through the bright steel of his eyes, which only so recently flashed a look of condemnation upon the suspected servant.

"Good-day to you, sir," said Monk humbly, and there was a catch in his throat which turned the words into something like a sob. "I won't trouble you again."

"Good-bye," answered Penreath soberly, without looking up. For a moment it seemed he was almost more embarrassed than Monk.

Then the door closed and the man who had judged was left alone.

He read the letters spread before him mechanically,

his sight, rather than his brain, following the words. Then, impatiently, he pushed the little pile together and thrust the unwelcome heap into an already overcrowded niche of his desk, kept for unanswered letters. He hated the labor of writing as fervently as he loved the labor of art. Save for the hard work done in his studio, he reduced the science of life to a science of ease. Letters, however important, were thrown aside impatiently. If people desired replies, let them come and ask—easy enough in these days of motors and express trains. As to invitations, was it likely he was going to fritter away his time upon dinners, luncheons or country-house visits? The last he regarded as absolute slavery, the entering of a gilded prison, the voluntary resignation of free will and home comforts. A hostess was a warder with invisible keys, demanding obedience, while the best-natured host on earth made Penreath feel like a caged lion, raging to escape from the routine of zoölogical gardens.

It was partly this love of home and quiet which made him so dislike anything in the nature of a scene. Once he had assured himself of Monk's dishonesty, the subsequent dismissal came as an upheaval in the tranquil program of his working day. Josephine, who usually removed from her husband's shoulders the yoke of mundane matters, absolutely declined to tell Monk he must go.

"I like the man," she said; "I have always liked him. If he swore he was innocent, I should not have the courage to declare he was guilty. It would probably end in him staying on and robbing us again."

Her words were so obviously true, she was allowed to retire into the background of this small unpleasant drama.

Arrow Penreath's study commanded a fine view of well-kept grounds, blazing with tulips on this early May morning.

Monk had planted the bulbs in quantity, that his master's eye might be fed by groups of glorious color. Some of the patches were almost painful to look upon, with the full sun showing up their rich deep crimson, at the base of which lay a pool of dark relief, an inky splash on the heart of the flower chalices. The artist's favorite tulip, known as the Cottage, flooded the broad borders in compliment to his fancy, straying in brilliant lines down long grassy avenues. Some had been traced to old French gardens, while others originated in the cottage homes of England, Scotland and Ireland. Each, in its own individual way, seemed holding a brief for Monk, as Penreath's troubled gaze turned to the window, opened widely to admit the soft spring air. Every possible hue appeared spread before him, a feast to satisfy his artistic sense. Rich carmine, heliotrope, amber and creamy white floated in gay regiments as far as eye could reach, soft primrose shading to golden yellow, tender salmon melting into rosy scarlet.

Certainly Monk could regard his work and say with truth:

"So far I have done well."

A soft footfall warned the owner of those flowered acres he was no longer alone. Josephine had pushed the door open silently, moving with the slow grace which characterized her every action. She had mastered the method of correct breathing and walked with an air of easy dignity and self-possession. She was an exceptionally young-looking woman for her age. Her supple figure, with its air of girlish elasticity, made it impossible to believe she could have a son of eighteen, already

at Cambridge. Her youth was acquired by the gentle talent of repose and discretion. To the very tips of her fingers she was *femme du monde*, always conscious of perfect control and well-ordered thought. She knew her world intimately from a life of varied experience, foreign travel and social intercourse. On all occasions she used her intelligence, cultivated tact and thoroughly understood her husband's somewhat nervous and highly strung disposition. She was mentally and physically fitted to excel in the exact sphere where Providence had placed her. In appearance she was singularly deceptive, since Time's hand left the delicate molding of her face and clear, bright complexion untouched. In fact, she was a Josephine of her own creation and carried her own atmosphere of unruffled calm.

Her voice, if a trifle artificial, was cleverly trained to a low melodious key, which never rose, even in moments of intense excitement, thus showing that art had, in this direction, become second nature.

"How did Monk take his dismissal?" she asked, looking up inquiringly into her husband's eyes and reading there an expression of worry, as he leaned upon the window-sill, inhaling the morning fragrance.

Arrow passed his hand over his forehead, as if to brush away the recollection.

"Well, he didn't exactly take it lying down. First he protested innocence, then vaguely hinted some malicious person must be making a scapegoat of him, but the defense was very feeble, and I refused to listen. I had already, you know, given him my proofs, at which he appeared dumfounded. I thought yesterday he was going to faint when I pointed out the altered figures in the account book. It is very unpleasant sending an old

servant away under a cloud; I hope it may never happen again. It is also tiresome having to look out for another man, who may cheat us even more successfully than Monk."

Josephine laid a soothing hand upon Arrow's shoulder.

"Don't think of that, dear. You can leave the finding of the new gardener to me. I have just heard from Lady Constance Eastlake. I know you call her a crank, but she really has done wonders with her School for Lady Gardeners. I happened to mention our dilemma in my last letter, and she declares women of gentle birth and good education fill such posts far more satisfactorily than men. Shall I read you her letter? She makes a suggestion which I fancy you may like to follow."

There was a quiet business-like air about his wife which was peculiarly soothing to the artist's nerves. He nodded his willingness to listen, and Josephine drew a thick sheet of writing paper from a beaded bag, suspended by an amethyst chain from her elbow.

" 'Dearest Jo,' " began the deep-toned voice, but the words were immediately interrupted.

"I wish she would not call you Jo," muttered Arrow, lighting a briarwood pipe, his constant companion. "A two-lettered name does not express you in any way. Abbreviations only suit abbreviated natures. Lady Constance has a mania for clipping what she considers superfluous syllables."

Josephine waited patiently till he had finished his objections, making no protest at the interruption, then she said with a smile:

"I think Jo delicious. It takes ten years off my age."

Nevertheless her calm manner was an unspoken reproach, and Arrow listened silently as she continued reading:

"'So very sorry to hear of your trouble with Monk. Will you try a new experiment, and let me send a lady gardener to take his place? I would not recommend this novel step in the management of the Rutherwyke gardens unless I felt sure I could supply a highly talented, absolutely trustworthy woman. She has taken the lead here for the past year and exerts a most extraordinary influence upon the other workers. Everything seems to thrive beneath her care, and I must confess I hardly know how we shall get on without her. Still, it is the object of the school to equip pupils for responsible posts, and we have little difficulty in finding them good situations, which they usually fill with satisfaction. Besides, Mary wishes to go, though we have made a real friend of her. She gives no reason for this wish, which is a little painful to me, since I have grown strangely fond of her. When she leaves, something will go out of my life, but until you know her, you will hardly be able to appreciate my feelings. I cannot really claim that her talents have developed in the Eastlake School, much as I should like to feel she owed her knowledge to the training here. Oddly enough, Mary had little to learn; she seemed to know everything by instinct. Her love of flowers is intense. She is like a devoted mother in a nursery, and the care and attention given to her duty is even a marvel to me, though I invariably expect a great deal. She would be quite contented to live alone in your gardener's cottage. She is of a very quiet and retiring disposition. There is just one thing about her which might not suit some people,

but knowing you and Arrow as I do, I don't think it would prove a serious objection. She is undeniably beautiful, but her beauty is not the type to create suspicion. She is simple in manners, habits and conversation and her record is absolutely good. She has the unspoiled beauty of purity and light, of the flowers themselves, not the *beauté de diable*. She could come as soon as you please. Let me hear your views quickly, I am so anxious to send Mary to you—for many reasons.

"'Yours impatiently,

"'CONSTANCE EASTLAKE.'"

The letter was carefully folded again and replaced in Josephine's bag.

Arrow Penreath smiled somewhat grimly as he turned the idea over in his mind.

"Lady Constance is all enthusiasm, but I wonder what Vines and the other men would think of it," he remarked, blowing a cloud of smoke into combat with the sunshine. "Of course, I can see Vines aspires to step into Monk's shoes; he is a pushing young fellow and ambitious, but not experienced enough to take the lead."

Josephine agreed.

"He has a good deal to learn yet," she said. "I fear he is hardly the man for a responsible post. He does what he is told; for the rest, I do not think his talents are very great."

Arrow's deep-set eyes wore a somewhat perplexed expression as his wife waited for him to speak again.

"I am quite willing," he said, "to try the lady-gardener experiment, if you are of the same opinion. Beauty is rare and not to be despised; for that reason alone we might give her a chance. Thank Heaven, I did

not marry a narrow-minded woman in deadly fear of a pretty face."

Josephine laughed lightly, glad that her husband appreciated Constance Eastlake's proposal and her own unsuspicious nature.

"You see I trust you," she replied fondly. "I cannot imagine a more lowering position than to look upon models or servants as possible rivals. Knowing your dislike to all that is ugly in life, I invariably surround you with good-looking people, and you have never made me regret my consideration. Now it has become quite a habit, and I instinctively avoid everything plain or unbeautiful for your sake."

He put his arm round Josephine and patted her shoulder tenderly.

"A wife who doesn't nag, a wife who isn't jealous, a wife who understands—that's the foundation of married happiness, a foundation we've sat tightly on for twenty years."

He spoke with a certain exaltation, which quarreled with his pipe. She thought so great a man should rise above the weakness of tobacco, yet she loved him for his homely habits.

Despite the May morning and open window, the warmth of the fire was welcome in the quaint room, and she turned to its ruddy glow, attracted by the cheerful singing of coals, which suddenly appeared alive with sound. From the black mass the noisy flames spouted outward, dancing into vapor in mad musical hurry. She knelt on the hearthrug, fascinated by the unusual commotion in the grate.

"Did Lady Constance tell you Mary's surname?" asked Arrow.

Once more Josephine drew the closely written sheet from its resting-place.

"I forget. I'll look," she said.

As she ran her eye over the lines, the page was in shadow, and she bent nearer the fire. Simultaneously the heat from the singing gases leaped out and drew the piece of writing paper away, straight into the fierce bosom of the "well" grate. Josephine tried to snatch it back, but the heat held fast its prize, and the thick-ribbed vellum writhed, curled, stood almost upright, then fell against the bars. For a moment the writing was startlingly distinct, then it became a charred blur, save for the one word "MARY," which stood out in letters of gold, illuminated by amber flames, holding the flimsy substance in some magic frenzy.

"What are you looking at?" asked Arrow, his eyes momentarily dazzled by the light.

His wife knelt with clasped hands, staring—staring into the burning heart of crimson. Then she beckoned her husband nearer.

"Don't you see?" she said. "The paper won't burn. What a strange effect! Can you read it, Arrow—that one word which resists the heat, yet seems to be alive?"

"Yes," he replied—"the name Mary."

As he spoke the papers shivered to ashes, the coals fell and the flames burned blue.

Josephine was silent. Her husband made no comment. She dared not confess this simple incident woke in her heart a first faint warning of superstitious dread.

Mary—a good woman, Mary—such a simple name, Mary—shining in fiery letters—a presence rather than a written word—a personality, strong with some mysterious power. Josephine could almost have sworn a

shadowy figure stood at her side and that spirit-voices whispered in her ear in strange, low musical accents the one persistent chant—

"MARY! MARY! MARY!"

CHAPTER II

A MOTORIST COMES TO RUTHERWYKE

CONSTANCE EASTLAKE was delighted when she received Josephine's reply, telegraphing at once she would motor to Rutherwyke the following Sunday. It was only a hundred-mile run, and that was nothing to Lady Constance and her husband, who flew about the country as thoughtlessly as birds on the wing, considering merely their own comfort and convenience.

Arrow laughed when Josephine handed him the wire, the laugh of the cynic and scoffer, as he pictured their coming in mocking words.

"I suppose she and Max will arrive like a pair of demons on a 120-horse-power racing car, mud-stained but happy, having triumphantly broken the law of the land or added to their many experiences of being caught by the police. What a disgraceful couple, and yet in the eyes of society their lawless behavior is an amiable weakness."

Josephine shrugged her shoulders; she had no patience with the motoring craze, which jarred upon her quiet temperament.

"Constance is old enough to know better, but until she has killed herself or somebody else she will continue to tour the country on that disreputable-looking machine, which is only fit for the track at Brooklands and should not be allowed on ordinary roads. Still I am

very glad she is coming. I want to hear all about Mary; I have many questions to ask Constance. Her letter filled me with curiosity."

Rutherwyke Place stood at the top of Rutherwyke Hill, just above the picturesque village of Abbotts Brooke. The artist had chosen this spot, since it commanded one of the finest views in Surrey. On the day of Lady Constance's lightning pilgrimage to the Penreaths the country cottagers were brought to their doors by the thunder of the Eastlakes' engines as a long bodiless car rushed by, vomiting flames from its mighty interior. It whirled up Pilgrim Way, it flashed through Rutherwyke Lane, leaving the great high-road from London to Salisbury in a cloud of dust, which momentarily blinded the terrified children, shrinking back into the whitened hedge, thrilled by a sense of joyful fear at witnessing such speed. Danger wielded its inevitable fascination, and they sighed with regret when the monster vanished from view.

"On the Sabbath, too!" muttered one old woman in her dust-laden porch. "It's enough to bring down the judgment of Heaven. Wouldn't I like to see 'em look back and turn into pillars of salt."

As she peered after the retreating car she could just discern two figures perched on small bucket seats, while a satellite balanced himself miraculously behind on a part of the machinery.

The gates of Rutherwyke Place were set open to receive the expected guests, but long before they reached the house the roar of their coming could be heard in the distance.

Josephine and Arrow, seated by an old stone fountain under the peaceful shade of trees, enjoyed in silence the gentle falling of water and spring-like notes of birds,

which alone broke the mysterious hush of the garden, until the thunder of the car echoed its approach from the distant glades of Pilgrim Way.

They exchanged glances and roused themselves from a stupor of drowsy content. A few minutes later Porterton preceded Lady Constance into the garden; she followed him with springing steps, wearing a very short brown skirt, leather coat and high tan boots. A man's cap, guiltless of veil, fitted tightly to her mop of crimson curls, growing in confusion over a well-shaped head. Her face was long and freckled, with good features and bright hazel eyes—such utterly fearless eyes, looking merrily out upon the world with keen appreciation, showing their owner's observant nature as an open window reveals the interior of a room. Her downright way of speaking somewhat alarmed strangers, but endeared her to friends, who called it characteristic and knew her words to be free from venom.

"Hallo, Jo!" she cried as Mrs. Penreath advanced. "I suppose you heard us miles away. This garden is like Paradise after the dust; I am ever so glad to be here. What a setting for you and your artist—delicious!"

She kissed Josephine warmly and waved an outstretched hand at Arrow.

"Good-day to you, Genius," she continued jokingly. "I have come to a land of roses and dreams."

"Where is Max?" he asked as the energetic fingers grasped his own with the firmness of a man.

"Only washing some grime off; he will be here directly. You can't keep clean in our new car. Max is going abroad to compete in some races next week and feels so sure of success that to hint at failure is an offense. If thoughts are things of power, his should

bring him many victories. He says England is impossible, and though he has been fined scores of times, will not acknowledge that he goes fast—calls it crawling. I am simply dying for a cig."

There was something peculiarly boyish in her breezy manner as she drew a cigarette case from her coat pocket and turned to Arrow for a light.

"I want exercise," she added vigorously. "I feel cramped after sitting so long. You wait for Max and I will go round the garden with Jo."

Lady Constance slipped her arm through Mrs. Penreath's and together they strolled in the direction of a vast forest of herbaceous flowers, with grass walks between the full rich borders, like broad bowling alleys of green, lined by dazzling blossom. The day breathed fragrance and the atmosphere was so clear that for miles the smallest objects were visible. The view from Rutherwyke lay bathed in sunshine, apparently wrapped in amorous slumber, so still, undisturbed and radiantly passive in its restful setting of emerald, overshadowed by eternal blue.

"I am indeed glad you are going to try the experiment I suggested," murmured Constance in a low voice directly Arrow was out of earshot. "Mary Aquila is a mystery, but quite the most delightful one I ever came across. I am pretty good at pumping people, but for two years I have failed to discover any details of her past life, except the fact that one can hardly mention any place in England she has not visited. She seemed to know Abbotts Brooke, but said she had not been there for many years. Yet she is quite a young woman, and one would imagine too poor to travel. She declares she has always lived the life of a simple peasant and merely spends the money earned by her own labor. She is ex-

traordinarily charitable. The people on the estate simply worship her, and to all appearances she is well bred and might go into any society. Perhaps you may solve the problem I can never hope to understand; it is above and beyond my comprehension."

Josephine stopped to pick a flower which exactly toned with the delicate mauve of her dress. As she pinned its stem to the lace of a floating scarf, she glanced up and caught the full expression of Lady Constance's eyes. Their merry raillery had vanished; they wore instead a strangely rapt look, full of awe and wonder, while her clasped hands suggested emotional tension. Mrs. Penreath felt so startled at the change that she hurriedly discussed conventional subjects, with a strange fear knocking at her heart.

"I am no good at guessing riddles, but I dare say I shall not see much of her," murmured Josephine. "I want to consult you about Monk's cottage and other arrangements. He has taken his furniture away, but I understand Mary wishes to bring her own. I am going to have the little place repapered and painted. Has she any particular fancy? You know I asked you in my letter to kindly find out her wishes on the subject."

Lady Constance shook herself free from that momentary reverie which carried her far away from Rutherwyke and the woman at her side.

"Ah! yes, I remember. She begs, if you have no objection, that it may all be painted pure white, with just a plain white paper. She wants to carpet the rooms in deep blue felt. She always wears an absolutely plain blue gown, the shade I call 'church' blue. It is extraordinarily becoming to her simple unadorned beauty. Really, last summer, when I saw her moving about among the Madonna lilies, she looked as if she

were the Virgin Mother, the Holy Mary herself, come to life."

Josephine gazed with open surprise at the speaker. Could this be Constance Eastlake, the practical unimaginative wife of an equally unimaginative husband?

"I have never known you wax poetical before," she declared. "This is something new. Is it the result of Mary's influence?"

Constance smiled; her eyes looked through Josephine to some fair vision beyond.

"Possibly, but do think of my words when the lilies bloom, and judge for yourself if my simile was not permissible. I dare say she will surprise you now and again. To-day a small incident occurred, which I thought would have infuriated Max. As we passed the school gardens Mary suddenly appeared and stopped our progress by peremptory gestures. Max was bound to draw up, thinking, of course, something serious had occurred. She came quite close to us, stretching her hands over the bonnet of the car, looking hard at my husband with her fathomless eyes. Then, as he bent forward inquiringly, she said in a strangely clear voice: 'Be careful of the children.' It was more than a warning; it was a command, certainly most extraordinary from an inferior. It absolutely took my breath away, but oddly enough he did not seem angry. I don't know what he would have replied, but she drew back quickly and was gone, almost before we realized she had moved. We hardly spoke of it as we came along; Max was silent and my lips felt tied. Yet all the way I heard those words ringing in my brain, and once, as he slowed up through a town, I caught him murmuring: 'Be careful of the children.' Now there is not another woman in England who would have dared to stop a man like Max

and give him such simple, heartfelt advice. I know it made a deep impression; his silence told me that."

Arrow's voice reached Josephine in the brief pause which followed Constance's words. He came toward them with Max, conversing freely in unguarded accents. Mrs. Penreath glanced quickly round in search of listening ears.

"I can see Vines, our second gardener, is pretty sick about it all," the artist was saying. "When I first told him he was to be under a woman, he didn't believe me—thought I was having a joke. Then, he declared, if it were true, he would prefer leaving, as the situation would be an impossible one. I took his decision quite quietly, and when he saw I was not at all put out at the prospect, he changed his mind and condescended to say he would stay on for a bit. I rather pity the newcomer. She will have to contend against a good deal of opposition on the part of the men."

Max Eastlake listened with a mild show of interest. He was built on a large scale, with amazingly long arms, a broad, fair, smiling face and well-fed, well-groomed body, decked in a light check suit, which few figures could have worn successfully. He was capable of humor, occasionally tinged with sarcasm, and being a fatalist, held his own life and the lives of others in light esteem. He prided himself on his taste for "the glorious mania of speed," which lifted him above the ruck of slow-moving pedestrians and mole-like creatures. He believed firmly that he was living a wide and splendid existence, looking upon himself as a hero and celebrity, ready to risk life and limb for a cause. The racing car was his god, an all-dominating passion in which he had steeped his soul. It was his idol, his creed, his daily thought. In Constance he found a woman with tastes

as abnormal as his own; the result was mutual happiness and a puny half-witted child, whose affliction apparently escaped the notice of a preoccupied father and mother.

Arrow's sympathy for Mary over Vines' strong resentment struck Max as unnecessary and slightly amusing as he pictured the woman whose spirit made itself felt like the warm rays of the sun which gladden the plainest landscape and beautify the humblest home.

"Wait and see," he said, "before you pity our lady of the garden. I don't mind betting you a pony Vines will be her devoted slave within twenty-four hours."

Arrow stroked his chin and looked at Max out of the corner of his eyes.

"Is she so fascinating?"

"Oh! it isn't exactly fascination, it's power—you will know what I mean when she comes, the power of simple goodness, which even a road hog can feel, when everything else becomes blotted out by dust."

He laughed at his own expense as he uttered the satirical condemnation of his cult.

"I offered to run her over here in the car when her time is up with us," he continued, "but she scorned the idea. She will come by a slow train in a humble third-class carriage, where she will soothe the savage breasts of fretful babies and talk of their infant charms until the gratified mothers believe they have borne angels unawares. Oddly enough, Constance tells me the most devilish squawker becomes angelic in Mary's arms. At Abbotts Brooke station she will send her modest luggage to the cottage by hand and walk through the village with that rapt expression on her face which makes every one turn and stare. She has a regal walk, which hardly prepares one for the humility of her mind. A personal compliment is agony to her soul. She appar-

ently has no idea that her radiant beauty might bring her fame and fortune. I often think of the fields she leaves unconquered out of sheer ignorance. It makes one long to enlighten her, if she had not such a fine scorn for riches."

Josephine and Constance fell back to listen while Max talked.

"Mary won't believe money brings happiness," said Lady Constance. "She is really not of this age. One might almost imagine she had come into the world by mistake."

Max shrugged his enormous shoulders and laughed as he added:

"Possibly the reason why we hear so little of her antecedents. But, joking apart, I am convinced Arrow will immortalize her face on canvas. I shall look for our lady in next year's Academy."

"But what will the garden do while she is sitting?" asked Josephine.

Constance glanced from left to right, taking in the splendid acres of floral cultivation. "Oh! the garden will still feel her influence and thrive."

Josephine paid little heed to the words, only afterward, when recalling all Constance had said of Mary, she remembered how seriously they were spoken. She thought, too, of the name written in letters of gold, shining in the depths of the study fire.

Not until the moon rose and the romantic grounds of Rutherwyke lay bathed in silver light did the fierce bellowing of the racing car once more rudely warn the quiet village of Abbotts Brooke that devils were abroad. But the driver slowed as he neared the cottages, and though he did not speak, he said in his heart:

"Be careful of the children."

CHAPTER III

MARY COMES TO RUTHERWYKE

ABBOTTS BROOKE wore a summer garb of cottage flowers. Porches bright with climbing plants showed open doors welcoming the air and light. The main road to Rutherwyke lay parched and white as the face of death. Wending her way through the sunny village came an unknown figure, wearing a gown of deep rich blue, made in such plain harmonious lines that the dignified grace of its simplicity caught the eye and soothed the senses. It was a nameless poem, suggesting the tone of foreign seas, the azure of Italian skies. The passers-by looked in wondering admiration at the beauty of the woman in blue. Children paused in their games and pointed to the radiant face of the stranger, without uttering a word, as if seeing a vision which robbed them of speech, until Mary's sympathetic smile set the small heads nodding in response. Now and again she stopped to address a baby creature, who, instead of drawing away in youthful shyness, came close to her skirt, lingering there as though fascinated by the fair features and kindly voice. Infantile hands touched her garments without fear as she bent to ask some question which showed how deeply she understood the inner working of the child-mind. Her words seemed to reach the tiny soul as a ray of light pierces a closed casement. Gradually as she mounted the hill she saw on each side

of the road women standing at the gates of small gardens or hovering in the open doorways of humble houses as if awaiting an expected sight.

Involuntarily Mary's eyes traveled in the direction of the turned heads and eager glances, quickly noting the reason of the interest. On the pale highway, bathed in sunlight, a dark object appeared—a hearse drawn by a single horse and followed by one mourning coach. Slowly the inky spot took clearer form, the brilliant day showing up the black carriage in which the dead rode forth—sunbeams dancing round the silver fittings and making play upon the humble flowers that decked the coffin lid. Involuntarily a hush fell upon Abbotts Brooke, the women lowered their voices, the children were cautioned to "get out of the way and keep quiet" and for a moment even the singing of the birds sounded less vital and strong.

"He was a good son to Mrs. Cray," said a woman as she bent down to snatch a whistle from the brown hands of her four-year-old child. "Nothing he could do was too much for mother so long as he had the strength to work. The Lord knows how she'll rub along without him. I guess we shall watch her being taken to burial next. They say she won't see a soul. She shut herself away even from the vicar and slammed the door in Mrs. Pertree's face when she called to offer a word of consolation. Seeing they were such friends, it isn't surprising Mrs. Pertree was offended and gave out she shouldn't draw down her blinds after such treatment. Of course I said as Mrs. Cray wasn't responsible at such a time, but Mrs. Pertree answered back that she herself had lost three children and never denied a neighbor a sight of the corpse."

Mary turned to the speaker and touched her gently

on the arm. The woman started and then stared in wide-eyed surprise at the beautiful face. Never had she seen such a pure, clear skin or exquisite features, but perhaps it was the complete harmony of the stranger's appearance which especially appealed.

Mary addressed her in a strangely soft tone.

"Is Mrs. Cray a widow?" she asked, her voice full of sympathy.

The laborer's wife nodded as she glanced again up the road.

"Yes, lady, and the boy was all the poor creature had in the world. She was like a mad thing when he got took with the consumption less than a year ago and went that thin he was like a walking skeleton. He was apprenticed to Mr. James the carpenter, and Mr. James was so fond of him, he offered to do the funeral free of charge. We always knew he was an open-handed gentleman and he appreciated the young man's worth."

The nearness of the slowly moving procession necessitated silence. Mary stood with clasped hands, watching the passing of the mother and son on their last journey together. Her eyes were moist with unshed tears as her gaze fell upon a bent form in heavy crape, visible through the half-closed window, a figure so mournful and bowed with woe that the stoniest breast must have softened at the spectacle of such untold grief. How easy to picture the desolation of that mind, the numb misery of a spirit in the prison-house of bitterest bereavement!

Until the somber carriages were out of sight Mary stood, riveted to the spot, gazing after the sad little funeral of youth, poverty and life cut short at its brave beginning. She could see deeply into the soul of the

mother who shut herself away from friendship and consolation.

Then she bowed farewell to the woman, who was handing back the whistle to her small boy. He blew it lustily, as though proclaiming that the silence and shadow were no more, the birds might sing again and the children play, since the widow and her son had vanished in the distance, to be forgotten quickly enough in the routine of daily toil. The spectators returned to their household duties, to the gossip over the clothes line, the scolding of fractious infants, the hundred petty demands of their small homes, momentarily dismissed by the majestic presence of death.

The woman who had spoken to Mary also turned to re-enter her cottage, then, seized by a sudden idea, darted back to the gate, beckoning the retreating figure with an air of mystery.

"Beg pardon, miss, but are you afraid of a drunk? Mrs. Benn has broken out again, and she lives along the road. Maybe you might like to cross over to the other side. You're pretty sure to meet her coming back from the Lion's Claw. She's a bit abusive at times and it sort of scares strangers."

Mary bent her head once more in acknowledgment as she answered simply:

"Thank you for the kind thought, but I am not afraid."

The woman turned to a neighbor in the next garden with a surprised shrug of her shoulders.

"Seems as if she was one of us," she murmured, jerking her thumb in the direction of the classical blue gown, "but there! I could have sworn she was a lady."

Mrs. Benn could already be seen emerging from the public house, where a little fair-haired boy stood pa-

tiently waiting for his mother. She caught him roughly by the wrist, muttered an oath and dragged him after her, as she reeled down the village path, in the direction of King's Bench Cottages. The child was very pale, and his baby cheeks were splashed with tears as the woman's cruel fingers gripped his tiny hand, leaving fierce nail prints on the flesh. They made a strangely ill-assorted couple, innocent youth linked to fiery red-faced age, silent baby lips and a foul, unguarded tongue speaking in guttural accents words unfit for the ears of a child.

Mary watched Mrs. Benn with a sickening sense of horror that such a travesty of womanhood should bear the thrice-blessed name of mother. She made no movement to leave the path empty and kept her stand as the unsteady figure lurched toward her, waving a beer-jug to clear the way.

"Git out o' my sight," she shouted hoarsely—"git out o' my sight—you piece o' Reckitt's blue!"

She dropped the child's hand, that with both arms she might sweep the offender from her path. It was the wild, dizzy effort of a brain inflamed by excess. Suddenly Mary's figure grew majestic; she remained without flinching, looking the woman full in the face, with a gaze that even to the drunkard's dazed intelligence appeared almost unearthly. The look seemed to steady the tottering feet and awake a sense of fear and keen resentment. Vice and purity were in spiritual conflict.

"What are you doing? What are you here for?" muttered Mrs. Benn thickly. "I don't know you and I want to get by. The path is mine as well as yours. What are you after?"

"I am going to take your child home," answered Mary, holding out her hand to the little fellow, who

stood cowed and terrified behind his mother. "I think he will be glad to come with me."

Her voice was like music, the soft liquid notes of a harp when genius touches the strings.

"Take him home," jeered the woman, "why, we're home already. Take him home!" she laughed stupidly. "I like that!"

Mary turned her luminous eyes to the boy and in their depths a fond maternal glow inspired confidence, hope, love.

"Would you like to come back to my home?" she asked. "I don't think you can want to stay with your mother. You will be so much happier with me."

The boy rushed forward in quick response to the welcome suggestion and hid his face in the folds of the blue skirt.

"Yes," he said, clasping both little hands over Mary's sleeves. "Yes, please."

Vaguely Mrs. Benn realized the invitation and acceptance.

"To your home?" she shrieked. "You want to steal my child?" A deeper fury flooded her brow with crimson. "That's the game, is it? You're a robber. You'd bag my boy, would you? Police! police! Some one is takin' the kid away. My Sam's being stolen. I'll have any one run in who dares lay a hand on him."

The sound of her strident voice brought a little crowd to the spot, and among the curious spectators a dark-eyed man, young and good looking, carrying a basket of flowers. He watched with deep curiosity the beautiful woman rescuing Sam from a repulsive and unnatural parent.

Mary hardly appeared to see the figures gathering round. Her mind was evidently centered upon that one

grotesque object of humanity. She stood, holding the child's hand, and still gazing at Mrs. Benn with an expression of mingled pity and reproach.

"When you are fit to be a mother, when you are a human being again, I will bring your child back to you," she said in deep, telling accents. A buzz of applause greeted the words.

"Well spoken!" muttered a tradesman who had jumped off his cart to discover what was occurring. "Mrs. Benn deserves all she gets. Good luck to you, lady. It's a crying evil to see the child with that woman."

"Bravo! miss," added the man with the flowers. "I've some young ones of my own, and if ever I made such a brute of myself, I hope somebody would come along and take the children away. That woman is like a mad creature at times. I've seen her boy black and blue with the blows she has given him. You certainly can't be too hard on her, whatever you say."

Mary tried to move on with Sam.

"I'll get you locked up, young person!" screamed the drunkard at the full pitch of her voice, barring the way successfully. "They know me at the police station—the station master's a great friend of mine; my husband used to work on the line."

The muddled words came stumbling from her lips as she shook her fist in Mary's face.

"The lady has collared Benn's brat," shouted an older boy; "here's a go! Fancy 'im finding a friend, what a bit of luck for Sam!"

Mary raised a hand to demand silence. The movement had an instantaneous effect. Not even the shuffling of feet broke the sudden hush which fell.

"The boy is coming with me," she said, addressing

the words to Mrs. Benn in a voice which rang out clearly on the spring air. "When you are sober, you can call and see me at the gardener's cottage, Rutherwyke Place."

The man with the basket started so violently that some of his flowers fell to the ground. He stood for a moment staring at Mary in dumb surprise. Then he took a step forward and hesitated again. She turned to him with her wonderfully illuminating smile.

"As you come from Mr. Penreath's, perhaps you would tell me the nearest way to the cottage?"

He wondered vaguely how she knew. He felt as if those bright eyes were looking deep down into his soul, with an expression so penetrating, that he grew red with sudden confusion. He stammered in halting accents: "Surely it's never Miss Aquila?"

She answered in a bell-like voice, which made him think of the seven chimes rung night and morning from the tower at Rutherwyke Place:

"Yes. Am I not right in thinking you are one of the gardeners?"

There was something so completely disarming in her open manner and quiet simplicity that the man forgot his previous resentment in marveling that one so fair of feature and with such natural dignity could, at the same time, be so unassuming.

"My name is Vines, miss. I came next to Monk in the garden."

"Ah! yes. I have heard of you."

The words were spoken reflectively, although Mrs. Benn still shouted abuse and would have snatched the child away but for Mary's protecting arm.

"We can go on together," continued Mary. "I shall be glad of a guide, if you will kindly show me the way."

She took it for granted Vines would prove a willing escort. Instinctively she appealed to all that was chivalrous in mankind.

"Are you bringing Sam along?" he asked with a doubtful glance at the child with the fair curls and wistful face. "I am not sure Mrs. Penreath will approve of your having 'Benn's brat,' as they call him, at Rutherwyke Cottage. You see, he isn't too clean, and his mother bears such a very bad name."

Mary moved forward, with the small boy trotting at her side.

"Mrs. Penreath won't mind," she answered confidently. "I am quite sure of that. You need not be alarmed."

Mrs. Benn was following with unsteady steps, muttering curses between her frequent cries of "Stop thief!"

"Well, of course, it is your affair, miss. But begging your pardon, how can you possibly know?" asked Vines, still speaking in a tone of almost reverent politeness. "You haven't seen her yet, and I may tell you both she and the master are mighty particular."

Mary smiled down at the child as she felt his hand tighten on her own, such a poor little, unwashed hand, feverishly hot from the excitement of adventure.

"I understood from Lady Constance Eastlake that Mrs. Penreath has a son. Well, when she thinks of him at Sam's age, she won't grudge the boy the shelter of the cottage, not if she has a woman's heart."

Vines felt the truth of the remark. He had not regarded the matter in this light before. Mary's words held wisdom as well as goodness.

"Maybe not, if you put it to her in that way." He turned back and shook his fist at Mrs. Benn. "Go home and stay there till you're sober," he cried. "You won't

be let through the gates of Rutherwyke, so you had better save yourself the walk."

Sam peeped up through his long eyelashes. He was old for his six summers and knew the way of the limited world in which he lived.

"Mother won't follow us when we get by the Lion's Claw," he said. "She'll go in there."

"Listen to his cunning," muttered Vines. "I never heard the like. But it's small wonder, miss, if he is old before his time with such a training."

The child pointed to a humble abode on the left of the winding road. The blinds were all drawn down and the house looked strangely desolate, guiltless of creeper or plant, and built of dull gray stone.

"Mrs. Cray has gone to see her son off to heaven," Sam announced, his shyness suddenly departing as their even steps outpaced Mrs. Benn's stagger. "I wouldn't like to live up there," with a toss of his curls to the sky.

"Why not?" asked Mary.

Her eyes sought the wide expanse of blue and rested lovingly where the light shone brightest.

"Too much thunder and lightning in that house for me," added the child philosophically.

"Ah!" murmured Vines, "he's thinking of last week's storm, it frightened my children, and the wife was quite nervous, too. She is a bit highly strung. A deal of damage it did in the garden. I don't know what Monk would have said had he seen the way the tulips were punished. I miss Monk wonderful; he was a good sort to work with and a great friend of mine."

Mary once more looked Vines full in the face, and his eyes fell before her glance.

"I am surprised to hear you were friends," she said.

Vines flushed a violent crimson, his throat, his ears,

his forehead turned red as the deep-hued roses he carried in his basket.

"I guess," he muttered, "that he found out your address and wrote something against me or it wouldn't surprise you, miss. In some ways he was a queer chap, got it into his head I wanted his place. Not very likely —seeing I was a pal of his from the first."

Evidently the speaker was endeavoring to control some strong emotion.

Mary appeared rapt in meditation. His heated retort in no way disturbed her equanimity.

"I knew nothing of Monk," she replied, "but sometimes I fancy I see into people's minds, perhaps it is living so close to nature, out in the open air. Our instincts tell us things that we could not divine otherwise. At least, this is my experience. We all possess unlimited powers, of which we are only dimly aware."

Vines wriggled his shoulders uncomfortably.

"A sort of thought reader," he muttered. "I wondered how you knew I came from Rutherwyke Place. Was that instinct, too?"

She pointed to the black lettering on the white straw of the basket he carried.

"I read the name. You forget you are labeled."

"Beg pardon, miss, it certainly slipped my memory, but what you said just now sounded a bit uncanny and sort of flustered me. To a plain-sailing fellow like myself it's strange to meet some one as looks into the mind. Might I make so bold as to ask if you would trust me in a matter of responsibility like? I've a bad way of expressing what I mean, but I think you will understand. I wouldn't like to feel you were against me."

He turned to her with sudden hungering inquiry. She noticed that his hands were clenched and his eyes

grew moist, as if with gathering tears. In some strange way she had moved this man to tempestuous emotion.

"To be trusted," she said, "you must first prove yourself trustworthy. It all lies in your own hands."

Vines felt puzzled at the evasive reply. Mary's attitude was in no way critical, she merely appeared to speak her thoughts aloud. She gave him the impression of quiet power and collected force. Her very presence at his side invigorated him physically.

"Mother's turned in at the Lion," piped a juvenile voice at Mary's elbow—"that's a good thing!"

The baby accents were bright with relief, and Sam's demure steps now took the form of little runs and jumps. An evil presence had been removed, he no longer feared recapture nor did he hear Mary's gentle sigh.

"I expect you know," said Vines, "that the master is a bit of a faddist, and not everybody gets on with him. He is eccentric and has queer ideas. I have never seen him go to worship at a church, but what he calls the Gabriel bell must ring without fail at 7 o'clock night and morning, something to do with religion. It has a wonderful tone, that bell; the master bought it in a second-hand shop at Wapping. He said it was to be rung for the devotion named the Angelus, just a fad as I said before, because he likes to hear the sound and keep up an old custom which sensible folks have given up centuries ago. These great people, with lots of genius, are often mad in a quiet sort of way, I've heard tell."

They had reached the gates of Rutherwyke and Mary followed Vines into the grounds, glancing lovingly at the beauty of growth and blossom. He was eager to display the garden's various charms and watch the effect on the newcomer.

"I'll take you first to the Monk's Walk," he said. "You may guess that's an old name, nothing to do with our late gardener. It is a long mossy path, lined with choice conifers, cut in by hand, and the finest in the country. If we'd nothing here but the conifers, it would make the place talked of. You see this was all monastic ground once, the master is choked up with the history of it. I have seen him talking by the hour to a gentleman who was writing a book on these parts."

While Vines spoke his eyes brightened, and his manner became more alert as he warmed up to his part of showman. Certainly Mary had a wonderful way of listening. Here and there she paused to study the flowers, and Vines, watching her shadow falling across them, noticed that many a bud, which he thought would not bloom for days, had unexpectedly opened to welcome the newcomer. All around there was a fresh, unusual hum of insect life. Everything appeared more vitally alive than when he left Rutherwyke Place to walk to the village. Yet he felt sure this was no mere myth or sentiment. The first butterflies of summer winged their flight in Mary's direction, with the freedom and exhilaration of rhythmical movement. A delicious scent floated on the air, given out in greeting, an odor so pungently sweet that he could not locate it, the mysterious blending of all that was delicate, pure and wholesome in Nature's field of blossom. Little Sam appeared intoxicated by the flood of color and the refreshing influence of soil, air and sun. He stretched out his baby hands with cries of joy and clapped them loudly. He tried to touch the whirling white wings of the butterflies far beyond his reach; he bent to kiss the flowers and laughed up at Mary with infectious glee.

"He don't seem to treat you like a stranger, miss," said Vines.

Mary smiled down on the boy.

"Children never do," she answered softly.

"Perhaps you've an instinct with them as well?" the man ventured to remark.

"Possibly. They always know who loves them. I think they are given the knowledge as a special protection. Children are never happy with unloving people."

Mary once more revealed her deep gift of intuition. Youth's helplessness appealed forcibly to her woman's heart.

"Leastways that youngster knows who is his friend," muttered Vines, with a grin, and waited for Mary to speak again.

"Children see much which older people miss. They are nearer the angels, that is why we treasure them. But you know this, for you have children of your own."

She had turned into the Monk's Walk. The velvety path of emerald moss, the mysterious silver of uniform trees suggested an atmosphere perfectly in keeping with cowled figures and sandaled feet. Vines had no poetical ideas upon the subject as he pointed from right to left, naming the various trees, which looked like fairy-tale monsters of silvered sea-weed, borrowing for their foliage the frost from delicate cobwebs, the shine of morning dew and tender summer mists. Like sentinels they stood, those trees of matchless beauty, while Mary passed between the noble line, with lingering steps and glowing eyes.

Vines spoke at last with palpable pride:

"You've never seen, I warrant, such specimens of Retinospora Plumosa Aurea, and just look at the shape

and coloring of this Filifera. Each tree is a gem in its own line. Mrs. Penreath thinks the Obtusa the finest of the lot, but there! she wouldn't know one from the other, if Monk hadn't schooled her up in the names."

At each fresh turn Vines had something of interest to narrate, hardly aware that by degrees the whole burden of the conversation fell upon his shoulders. He did not realize Mary had passed in absolute silence down the Monk's Walk, with clasped hands, while the child ran on ahead, in pursuit of a rollicking bumble bee. Strange she could prove such a sympathetic companion, without uttering a word! From that quiet presence came an outflow of force, real though invisible, the power of a bright and hopeful spirit.

When eventually they reached the cottage she just smiled her thanks, and murmuring "Come, Sam," passed in as if it had been her home for years. Vines peered through the door at the newly whitened rooms, hardly able to reconcile the spotless interior with the previous residence of Monk.

The late occupier had rejoiced in the adornment of family portraits, on somberly papered walls, and many knicknacks of the inexpensive order, collected by Mrs. Monk at shops termed "bazaars."

Vines could not have explained why, but a sense of chill and loss possessed him as Mary withdrew from his sight, closing the door. He lingered a moment, shivered slightly, thinking again of Monk and the tragedy of his departure. Then, finding the memory of that ill-fated friend singularly unpleasant, Vines turned and hurried away through the garden, which now seemed full of a strange new enchantment. The trees and plants were giving out an element he had never felt before, a vitalizing elixir, an atmosphere of joy.

"It's a wonderful growing day," he murmured to himself, "a wonderful growing day."

He passed by Penreath's studio and saw his master in the doorway, palette in hand, mixing his paints.

"Well, Vines," he said, "seen Miss Aquila yet?"

"I have, sir. I chanced to meet her in the village as she was walking up from the station. We came the rest of the way together."

Arrow remembered Max Eastlake's words. So the motor had not been requisitioned and Mary preferred to arrive humbly on foot.

"I hope she impressed you favorably, as you have to work with her. You must let me know if you decide to remain on permanently."

The artist looked curiously as he spoke at Vines' blushing face, noting something new in its expression and a softer light in the nut-brown eyes.

"She is a real plucky woman, sir," answered the man warmly. "Not a scrap of fear in her, though she ain't too strongly built. She was having a bit of a parley with Mrs. Benn on the road, and seeing as Sam's mother was the worse for drink, the new lady gardener has made so bold as to bring 'Benn's brat' back here to the cottage. Seems inclined to adopt him for the time being. I should say she has a rare fancy for children."

Arrow let his arm fall to his side, while his pipe drooped limply in his mouth. Could it be really true, that Mary had dared to import the dirtiest child in the village to Rutherwyke Place? Vines' statement sounded definite enough, but then Vines might be under a wrong impression. The speaker read disbelief in his master's eyes and repeated the words:

"She's brought Benn's brat to the cottage here."

"The devil she has!" said Arrow.

CHAPTER IV

THE GABRIEL BELL

MRS. VINES awaited her husband's return in their little cottage a few yards away from the south lodge. Her young face wore a tired look. The lips were pinched and discontented, as if indeed they had forgotten the pleasant habit of smiling or speaking kindly words. Her lusterless fair hair was drawn high off her forehead over a pad of a darker shade, revealing its presence at intervals through parted locks. Her dress, garnished by scraps of velvet and stray bows of ribbon, appeared lamentably pretentious, while several pieces of artificial jewelry proclaimed her fondness for cheap ornamentation.

"Well, Matthew," she said as Vines appeared in the doorway, "what do you make of Miss Aquila? I have been trying to picture her arrival at Rutherwyke, and I can't get used to the thought of you and the other men knuckling under to a woman—you especially, as looked to be first. When Monk left I made sure we should be given a lift up; instead it seems the master has gone out of his way to kick us down and humble us before our neighbors. My word, but it sets one's blood boiling when I remember how hard you worked and all my efforts to get into Mrs. Penreath's favor. It don't seem no good trying."

Hettie's small, sharp eyes glistened with vindictive

fire. She was of the money-loving kind, and but for her avaricious nature and eager desire to spend, Vines would have been glad enough to live on half his earnings and save the rest for the proverbial "rainy day." Her discontent soured his life. Ambition ruled her every thought, darkening the home with its sinister influence. To Matthew's sensitive nature his wife's daily grumbling was an injurious element, eating into his soul, preying on his mind and robbing him of sleep. Often he felt as if her depression were placing him under a spell, dragging him down to evil depths of despondency, arresting all higher development, chaining him to paths of darkness. Now he came forward slowly and dropped into a chair, while Hettie watched him with her curious, searching eyes. For a moment he said nothing, but his calm expression puzzled her; it was so much more peaceful than usual, while the nervous facial movements she had frequently noticed since Monk's departure were absent to-night.

"I suppose the new gardener came right enough," muttered Mrs. Vines, surprised he did not answer her previous remark. (The words were accompanied by a rattle of cups on a tray, giving cheerful promise of speedy refreshment.) "Women who push men out of their places take good care not to be ill or late at their posts; they would die sooner than make way for the male sex, who have wives and children to support. I've read of lady clerks in the papers; a fine setback they are to honest men, taking lower wages and putting in longer hours. When it comes to other professions, such as gardening—well, you don't know where the sly and crafty creatures are going to stop."

She laid a cloth upon the table, stained with the result

of previous meals, putting it down impatiently as she marveled at her husband's imperturbable manner.

At last he spoke.

"Miss Aquila is not so bad as I thought," he vouchsafed, half grudgingly. "She is quite a lady, with a nice way of speaking and a kind—well, I may say a really beautiful smile."

The feminine hands, busily engaged, fell suddenly in a nerveless line with Hettie's rigid body. Then she turned, as a quick tiger might, on the man, and laughed sarcastically in his face.

"Oh! so that's to be the way of it—start admiring her at once. I might have guessed as much! But, mind you, I could be the one to cut up rusty, if things go too far. It is quite on the cards Mrs. Matthew Vines will have something to say to a real lady what takes wages and spends her days about among the flower-beds, with good-looking young men. Possibly you forgot to tell her you had a wife and family at home. Perhaps she won't trouble to smile quite so much when she finds you are the father of twins and no good to any one but your lawful belongings."

Vines took no notice of the sharp words, he was too accustomed to Hettie's tongue. He just leaned back in his chair, and because the memory amused him, recounted graphically the scene in the village with Mrs. Benn and his master's subsequent confusion at hearing "Benn's brat" was at Rutherwyke Cottage.

Hettie listened with a mollified air, which gradually developed into open satisfaction.

"Strikes me she's begun badly," murmured Matthew's better half with a chuckle as she cut thick slices of bread for the evening meal. "Mr. Penreath is not the sort to stand any cheek, and Miss Aquila will find that out in a

precious short time. Now I wouldn't mind betting that before the year is over you will be in Monk's shoes, top of everything. The way they've done up that cottage fairly makes my mouth water. It is all white as milk—good enough for a duchess, and wouldn't it just suit Mrs. Matthew and the Masters Matthew, with a mail-cart painted white to match? I think I see myself there, cutting a dash with the twins in new frocks of stiff embroidery and everything smart and fresh and clean."

The little pink tip of Hettie's tongue shot through her lips, making a quick tour of their narrow surface. She smiled in anticipation of the pleasant thought, and her breast heaved, as if indeed the bet were already won, and the snowy walls sheltered the Vines family in a fair and beauteous setting. To her surprise Matthew sprang to his feet, drawing himself up to his full height, clenching his fists ferociously. He turned a pair of angry eyes on Hettie.

"I don't want to be in Monk's shoes," he cried, and the impetuous tone rang true. "I was glad from the first that I did not get his place. He had been turned away for stealing, remember, and it isn't lucky to take on a thief's berth. If I were up there in that cottage, I would be haunted by his face every night in my dreams, I'd feel under a curse. I thought of him to-day, as I stood near the door—you may call me soft, Hettie—but I thought of the tears I saw on his cheeks. Now the newcomer won't know all he suffered in that house; it will seem bright enough to her. We are better away, better here in the smaller home, than yonder with the ghosts of painful memories."

Hettie stood with a kettle in one hand, and a teapot in the other, listening with a fair show of surprise.

Then she poured the steaming water on the tea-leaves, and laughed shortly before replying.

"Can't see why you should take on to pity a lying scoundrel like Monk. It isn't your way to turn sentimental. Maybe you'd drop a tear or two yourself, if you had cheated, and told untruths, and then been found out. He brought it on his own shoulders, and thoroughly deserved the sack. Though he swore he was innocent, we all know he just lied to the end. If he had owned up, I would have felt more sorry for him. As you've said again and again, there wasn't a shade of doubt he was a blackguard."

Vines sank slowly back into the vacant chair.

"Did I ever say that?" he asked, and his voice shook slightly. "Are you quite sure?"

Hettie shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

"Of course you must remember. Why, we've talked it over time upon time, till I confess I am a bit sick of the subject. Why, you helped to prove his guilt. You must be wool-gathering this evening, Matthew, to be so dull and forgetful. By the way, I heard from a neighbor that Monk can't get another place, somehow he don't seem to have the heart to try, declares it is no good now his character is gone. All the courage has gone out of him; I suppose it is the sense of guilt and shame. He has saved a bit of money, and he said when that was gone, he would most like blow his brains out, as life held nothing more for him now. Of course, it is just high talking to get sympathy, and something may come along sooner than he thinks. Ain't you going to drink your tea? No use worrying your head over a good-for-nothing fellow like Monk."

Vines slowly stirred the warm fluid, fixing his eyes

upon a row of spring flowers in the window-box. Their fragrance made him think of Mary.

"A good-for-nothing fellow may be good for something, even though you don't think it possible," he said thoughtfully. "Can't you see, Hettie, the temptations a man might fall into—how he could drift toward crime without realizing what he was doing? Maybe he'd have an extravagant wife, always nagging him for cash, telling him her dresses were a disgrace, and the kids wanted better clothes, jeering because he couldn't give her the same luxuries as some togged-up friends of hers. It's competition—competition what ruins you women and sours your lives and the want to be grand that sends your husbands to hell."

His voice rose to quick, fierce tones, which startled Mrs. Vines into angry remonstrance and self-justification.

"I don't know who you are getting at, Matthew, but a dowdier woman than Mrs. Monk never existed, and as to nagging her husband, I will say she was a deal too kind to him. Besides, if you mean to insinuate I am extravagant, let me tell you that before my poor father lost his money I was accustomed to live in the style of those 'togged-up' people you allude to so disrespectfully. You can't be surprised if I'm a bit sore at being tied to a mere gardener, when, but for fancying a handsome face, I could have married a rich draper at Egham and kept my pony carriage."

Vines relapsed into silence. He had heard that tale so often when Hettie pressed him for money. Sometimes he felt as if the rich draper took the form of an evil satyr, cursing their lives and casting a shadow which chased the brightness from the humble home they might otherwise have loved. It was the draper's mythi-

cal presence illuminating the past, which made everyday tasks appear bitter to the woman who remembered she might have had servants of her own in a trim flat above the Egham Emporium.

"It's my belief," continued Hettie, returning after a pause to the subject of Mary, "that a lady gardener will make a fine muddle of Rutherwyke Place, especially if she is pretty. That sort never cares for hard work. Say, Matthew, were you just having a lark with me or has she—has she really a beautiful smile?"

A note of keen anxiety rang through the words. Vines, smarting still from the painful allusion to the draper, seized this opportunity of revenge.

"Yes," he replied. "I used the word beautiful because I could not think of a stronger expression at the moment; perhaps I should have said—heavenly, that is the better way to describe it—a heavenly smile."

Hettie chopped off the top of her egg viciously and muttered, "Pepper, please," in a sepulchral voice. Vines could see she was seriously disturbed.

"I used to think Mrs. Penreath had all the looks here," he continued, "but Miss Aquila licks her into a——"

He stopped short, for the sound of some one knocking gently on the door brought Hettie to her feet. As she rose to answer the summons, she turned back with a pursing out of her lips in Matthew's direction.

"I know the sort of hussy," she whispered. "Oh! there will be trouble yet, you mark my words."

The tapping came again. This time it echoed through the cottage, seeming to demand the attention of the occupants.

"All right, I'm coming."

Hettie straightened the flat red satin bow at her throat and turned the door handle, muttering to herself:

"Probably only a beggar. They are a perfect pest on this road, as if we had anything to spare!"

A wonderful after-glow stained the sky a rich scarlet and the brilliant color made a vivid background to a figure in plain blue, standing erect upon the threshold, smiling.

"Yes, you are right," said a low, clear voice, "I have come to beg." Hettie wondered how the speaker could possibly have heard the inaudible ejaculation.

In a moment Hettie knew who the stranger must be. Had not Matthew called it "a heavenly smile"?

As if sure of her welcome, Mary entered the humble abode, her eyes alighting gladly on the brave show of spring flowers.

"What a sweet home!" she said.

Hettie drew a chair forward.

"Take a seat, miss; you look tired."

Mary thanked her, but remained standing.

"I am sorry to disturb you at your tea, but I came to ask if you could spare just a few little garments for a poor child. It is too late to go to the shops, and Sam is in bed, wrapped up in one of my shawls. I have burned all his clothes. Of course, you must let me pay for anything I take; the money will buy something new for your twin boys."

She addressed the words to Mrs. Vines, and Matthew thought the steady gaze must be looking deeply into his wife's character, guided by the instinct he had feared earlier in the day.

Hettie's eyes sparkled. She loved new clothes and instantly saw her chance of striking a bargain.

"Of course," she said, "I wouldn't let my children put on anything again that Sam Benn had worn."

Mary's face was bright with happy thoughts, and in

her tranquil expression it was easy to read the peace of a quiet soul. Softly she answered:

"I don't fancy you would say that if you could see him now."

Hettie felt unconvinced.

"He was in a rare filthy state last time I saw him," she declared, "and Matthew says the master swore when he heard you'd got Sam Benn at the cottage. Oh! yes, Mr. Penreath knows how to use strong language at times," seeing Miss Aquila's look of surprise. "I believe people who work for fame are never very sure of their tempers. Sometimes I think he must find it a bit of a strain being a celebrity and having to turn out fresh work year after year for the public to praise or pick holes in."

Matthew shuffled his feet uneasily and frowned at Hettie, annoyed that she should speak of Arrow Penreath's displeasure.

"That comes of telling you things," he said. "Wouldn't it be more to the point if you hurried up over them clothes instead of talking about your betters? It's no business of ours what the master says or thinks."

Hettie sniffed at the rebuke, tilted her chin in the air and turned to a door leading to a winding staircase.

"May I come with you?" asked Mary. "I should love to see the twins. I suppose they are in bed."

Mrs. Vines appeared flattered, though she whispered cautiously: "You won't wake them?"

Matthew watched the two women disappear, noting that Hettie's footfalls were heavy and made the old stairs creak, while Mary moved like a silent shadow, giving the commonplace surroundings an air of distinction by the mere influence and beauty of her presence. He could not picture her ever indulging

despondent thoughts or unkind feeling. The atmosphere she created transformed the small house into a dwelling of delight, for the symmetrical figure apparently brought its own sunshine. Matthew recalled her brief comment of appreciation, when glancing round the flower-sweetened room, dwelling on the words with satisfaction, soothed and cheered by a sense of sympathy.

Hettie went straight to a chest of drawers which held the boys' clothes as she entered the low-roofed sleeping apartment, but Mary turned to the children in their comfortable cribs. They were lying with chubby arms flung out upon white sheets—one had his face crushed into the pillow, the other slept with head thrown back, half smiling, as though some happy dream made slumber rich.

Mary bent down and whispered in his ear. Hettie's back was turned and she heard no sound. Just for a moment he opened his eyes and pursed up his lips for a kiss. Then Mary held her hand over his forehead and he was instantly asleep again.

"What wonderful twins, and only four years old," said the visitor softly. "They are nearly as big as poor little Sam at six. I am sure I can make the clothes fit."

The child with his face in the pillow suddenly rolled over, rubbed his eyes and sat upright.

"There, you've been and done it; I feared as much," muttered Hettie. "He's a terror to get to sleep. If I did not pack them both off right early, I should never be able to get Matthew his high tea by the time he comes home. They are just like quicksilver; you can't keep them still."

Hettie bustled across to the child and laid him back

with a firm hand, shaking her head and putting her finger to her lips to enjoin silence.

"Mother," he lisped, pointing at Mary, "angel—angel."

Hettie laughed, despite her previous annoyance.

"Excuse me saying so, miss, but it's your face has took the child's fancy, and he thinks you are an angel. Mighty funny ideas the kiddies get hold of at times, but that beats the lot. Now, Joey, if you don't go to sleep at once, the angel won't ever come and see you again."

The child obeyed so promptly that Hettie could hardly believe her eyes. She watched him with a growing sense of amazement as he snuggled back into his usual position, murmuring:

"Oh! yes, she will," in a tone of peaceful assurance.

Mary moved to the little pile of clothes Hettie had spread on the floor. Quickly she selected a few suitable garments, knowing in a moment what she required, though the light was dim and the contents of the drawer were heaped untidily in a specially dark corner.

"May I take these?" she asked, gathering them up contentedly and holding out a golden coin to the astonished Hettie.

The woman stared at the money in open surprise.

"Lor'! miss, a sovereign is too much. Matthew would say I had been robbing you. Those small things cost very little. I ran them up myself on the machine."

"A favor granted," said Mary sweetly, "is worth so much more than gold that in reality it is a poor exchange. You are helping me in an emergency and I am very grateful."

"I wouldn't mind," Hettie acknowledged, her fingers itching to seize the coin, "if I thought you could afford

it all right. But you are just working for your living same as Matthew, though you're a lady sure enough."

Mrs. Vines grew red as she spoke, hoping her words would not give offense.

"It is because I am working for my living that I can afford to pay," answered the low voice, which failed to rouse the twins, so softly were the words spoken. "In a sense, we are all gardeners. If we want the flowers of life, we must sow the seeds and tend the soil. The best reward comes after labor, when the flowers bloom."

She placed the money into Hettie's not unwilling palm, and as their hands touched a strange, overwhelming sensation of mingled awe and wonder took possession of Matthew's wife. She trembled instinctively, and though her lips smiled, her eyes filled suddenly with tears, while vaguely she remembered her remarks about Mary, as if they had been uttered long ago. Though ignorant and uncultured, she felt Mary was no ordinary woman, realizing that the newcomer (resented, hated, abused but a few hours since) made the world feel purer, fairer, nobler by the light of a radiant and almost petrifying beauty. No artifices of fashion aided the unspoiled loveliness of that expressive face, no tricks of speech or gesture marred the open-hearted simplicity of Mary's manner. A desire to make her linger—to keep her there—in the children's chamber filled Hettie with restless energy. She sought about for an excuse to delay the guest's departure.

"Let me show you a few more things, you've not taken enough," she gasped, darting across to another diminutive cupboard from which she drew some much-prized treasures.

But Mary shook her head. The dying glow of the sunset crept into the room.

"Not a bad view from this window," added Hettie, opening the latticed panes. "Never saw the sky finer than this evening, and the light don't seem to fade away so quickly as usual. Look, miss, the crimson and gold are still there, though it's seven o'clock. Ain't it a fine sight? Seems like a glimpse of heaven."

As she spoke a mellow bell chimed out rich peals of sound from the tower at Rutherwyke Place.

"That always puzzles me," said Hettie. "I can't understand why they should ring three bells, then pause, and on again. Matthew says it all means a prayer to the Virgin Mary, and it is called the Gabriel bell. I have often thought I would like to hear some of the words it is supposed to say, seeing I know the sound so well, morning and evening, evening and morning, always at the same hour. The people outside think it is rung for the servants' meals, but those who belong to the place are told that it means something holy, to please the master's fancy, and so they listen for it with a different ear."

"Yes," murmured Mary, "with a different ear."

She echoed the words in a tone of pain. Her face looked suddenly drawn and haggard, yet its spiritual beauty remained unimpaired, the beauty of soul triumphant over fatigue or ill health. She leaned against the window, looking out toward the spot from whence the music of the bell chimed its message of mystical meaning. Hettie waited for her to speak, watching the strange, concentrated expression of her eyes.

"You would like to know some of the words," she murmured. "Well, I suppose that is natural. Listen, but do not repeat them. The first bells say:

" 'The angel of the Lord appeared unto Mary and she conceived by the Holy Ghost.' "

The voice of the speaker sounded faint and far away, as the evening shadows wrapped her like a shroud. Hettie could see the shining eyes glowing in the pale face, only the eyes, all the rest seemed veiled mysteriously. Of course it was growing dark. Hettie told herself this was the cause of the uncanny visionary effect.

"Any more?" she asked curiously.

Mary bowed her head and continued in the same hushed tones. Apparently she spoke to the mild night air, to the first glimmering star in the clear blue beyond the dying amber, to the thread of a moon making its shy entrance at the heels of departed day. Hettie's heart beat faster as she listened to the words:

" 'Hail, Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women and blessed be the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, both now and at the hour of death.' "

Miss Aquila's hands were pressed to her heart, for a moment she seemed struggling for breath. Her very lips were white and trembling, with a parched look, as if a fever robbed them of their rosy freshness.

"Is that all?" whispered the woman at her side.

Mary's head sank low, bowed upon her breast. Her whole attitude grew humbled as she added:

"The Virgin answers: 'Behold the handmaiden of the Lord: be it unto me according to Thy word.' "

Matthew's voice from below called up through the shadows:

"I say, Hettie, don't forget you haven't finished that egg, and your tea will be mighty strong by now."

His wife answered from the open wind:

"Lor'! it clean escaped my memory. Miss Aquila and

I got talking. You might put some more water on to boil."

The interruption came like a rough descent from Paradise to earth. The two figures moved across the room, Mary's footfalls still making no sound, despite the uncarpeted floor.

"Very kind of you, miss, to trouble to tell me them things," murmured Hettie. "When the Angelus tolls now, I shall think of you, and know what it all means."

A trembling hand was laid on Hettie's shoulder, while the earnest eyes of the stranger gazed at her with sudden entreaty.

"Not of me—think of the Child—the Child that was born to Mary. If the bell brings Him to your mind, you will be far—far happier."

"By the way, it's your name, I believe. Aren't you Miss Mary Aquila?" As Hettie spoke her face grew eager with inquiry.

"Yes."

"I always thought of it as rather a commonplace name, but since I met you there's a difference somehow."

Hettie led the way downstairs.

Mary went straight to the open door leading to the street.

"Good-night," she said, passing out with her bundle and bowing to Matthew, who was standing by the fire with a kettle in his hand.

Hettie ran after her at a sign from the man and asked shyly:

"He wants to know if he shall see you safe back to the cottage, miss?"

Mary held out a grateful hand as she took her leave with a smile and shake of the well-poised head.

"Thank you for the kind suggestion, but I am not alone."

Hettie went back to her husband mystified.

"I wonder who she's got with her; there's no one in sight."

They closed the door with happy faces.

"It was worth having my tea spoiled to talk to her," declared Mrs. Vines.

"To say nothing of the money," added Matthew, remembering his wife's weakness.

"Oh!" murmured Hettie with a start, "how strange, I had forgotten about that."

CHAPTER V

THE MOURNER IN THE HOUSE

MARY'S first evening at the cottage was not a lonely one. Her own thoughts, her rich fund of sympathy, those very instincts Vines feared, were living forces around her. Every moment of the day she was giving out the light and power of a personality few could understand. It cost her no effort, this free and willing gift. In less than an hour the new home became part of Mary herself, seeming to reflect the simplicity of the pure mind and radiant soul which dwelt within its walls. Sam, clean, well fed and deliciously drowsy, slumbered in an improvised bed, put deftly together by her skilful hands. He was no longer the same Sam the village people had pitied and yet shunned. Now his curly hair made a halo of gold about his head, after careful washing and brushing. With kindly treatment and the removal of dirt, an unexpected glow of physical beauty transformed the child into a little cherub of pink-and-white sweetness. Only when he had apparently fallen asleep and Mary stole softly to his side, the fact of a presence near him sent the small arm suddenly up to his shoulder in an attitude of defense, as if warding off a blow.

"Poor little son of sorrow," she murmured, "poor unloved waif, how badly you needed me!"

She kissed the bright locks on the pillow and lowered

the defending arm with a mother-touch of true affection. Sam half opened his eyes and smiled widely.

"I thought," he said, then paused to sigh—"I thought you were the Lion's Claw."

Mary, drawing him closer to her breast, sang in a low sweet tone the words of an old lullaby, and the child drifted back into a land of dreams, peopled by women with soft musical voices, by flowers, butterflies and strange new houses of kindness and ease.

For a time she watched him before drawing away her arm; then moving to the window, Mary pulled up the blind, that the young moon in its infancy and the twinkling stars might shine upon Sam, keeping watch over his slumbers.

"He won't be frightened now if he wakes," she said, drawing a long cloak about her shoulders and glancing back once more at the child's peaceful face before passing out into the mild night of soft breezes, playful shadows and uncertain lights.

The garden was so still that even the falling of a leaf might be heard. Against the blue sky tall fir-trees made inky splashes, with a winding hedge of closely cropped holly glistened darkly on her right. She walked beneath its shadow until she reached the drive, then hastened toward the gates leading to Pilgrim's Way. She easily remembered the nearest path to the village, for Vines pointed out a short cut used by those who were not nervous of lonely roads. Pedestrians by night were few and far between at Abbotts Brooke, and silence reigned over the deserted thoroughfares. Most of the cottagers retired early. When the sun set loafers wandered homeward or sought the shelter of the Lion's Claw. As Mary neared the quiet homesteads she

stretched out her hands as if in blessing—hands white like the moonbeams dancing in the hawthorn hedges.

Lights glowed from distant windows, and she felt as if each told some story of life within—of sorrow or sure content, of malicious words or happy smiles. In one dwelling the empty cot made a heart barren. In another patient mother arms rocked a fretful child to unconscious forgetfulness of early woes. So the flickering candles shone out upon the night, guarding their secrets well—from all but Mary. Swiftly she walked, never pausing to recall the way, till she reached the door indicated by Sam when he remarked: "Mrs. Cray has gone to see her son off to heaven."

No trace of light in that house of mourning, save the glimmer from a street lamp exactly opposite the widow's window. Possibly eyes which had wept for a dead son could not bear any stronger illumination than a ghostly reflection shooting pale streaks of faint radiance across her floor, revealing the outline of furniture grown familiar to the owner of the room.

Mary knocked gently, yet her knocking held assurance as of one who meant to enter. To herself she said: "This sad house needs a friend—the Powers of Darkness are reigning within."

At first the still house gave forth no answer; then, as Mary knocked again, somebody moved in the somber room. The closed window opened slowly and a muffled voice asked:

"Who's there? I can't see anybody. Please go away."

Mary passed from the doorstep into the full glare of the street lamp which shone upon her face, illuminating the blue of her cloak and enveloping her whole figure in pale mysterious rays. The artificial light gave her

features an unearthly beauty and startling fragility. She looked like an ethereal visitant from some other planet, drawn to this threshold by the wail of a spirit in pain.

The woman at the window was so completely in shadow that only the outline of her bent form could be dimly traced against the casement. She was holding one of the curtains, which trembled in her hand, cowering behind its folds as if in mortal dread.

"Don't you remember me?" asked Mary's soft voice.

The words were spoken clearly, demanding attention by their friendly intonation. Mrs. Cray peered into the night, shading her brow with her hand, drawing away from the temporary shelter of the dark red curtain.

"I've seen you before," she said in tremulous accents. "Yes, I've seen you to-day, I think."

The answer conveyed shy hesitation and caused the speaker physical effort.

Mary drew nearer, with outstretched hand, to reassure the nervous woman in the window.

"Yes, this afternoon. Just for a moment our eyes met. I wanted to come to you then, but I could not, there were so many people. Instead I decided we should meet at night when all would be quiet and we could talk together undisturbed. I am a friend. You are alone—let me in."

The widow drew back from the casement, and a moment later hurried fingers could be heard unlatching the door, which only opened an inch, as Mrs. Cray peeped out, afraid her senses were playing her false and that the unexpected visitor would have vanished into the shadows of the dimly lighted street.

"Who are you?" she asked, almost angrily, her

broken accents shaking with a petrifying sense of terror. "Who are you, I say? Why do you come here?"

Mary answered in quick reassuring tones:

"I called because I knew you were in sorrow, and I have suffered, too, so I can understand. By that suffering we are sisters, only a sister is not usually left outside. She has the right to be received—she expects a welcome."

Mrs. Cray's fear vanished as she listened. Slowly she made way for the speaker to enter, still standing back in the dark. Without a word Mary crossed the threshold and placing a protecting arm about her shoulder, drew her into the dimly lighted room. The touch of the loving clasp brought courage to the woman's breast.

"I've seen no one," stammered Mrs. Cray. "I set my face against it; I wouldn't let them in. How could I? The people here, who knew my boy, all came out of curiosity just to look—I tell you it's true, they only came to look, they are all alike. They take death as a show; they go where the dead lie. But I knew them of old, I closed the door, I wept alone."

Mary stroked the tired head as it fell unresistingly upon her shoulder, and the kind magnetic hand conveyed a supreme sense of power.

"You shrank from their sympathy," she murmured, "merely because you were too upset to realize that at heart they really sorrowed with you. I know this, for I heard them talking to-day as you drove by. Their words were full of kindness and praise for your son. They knew well all that he was to you, they spoke of his goodness to his mother and how terribly alone she must be without him."

Mrs. Cray looked up wonderingly into Mary's face.

The street lamp still revealed the perfect features of this unknown friend, so spiritual, yet conveying much of the mind beneath, telling of high purpose and endeavor made strong through suffering.

"Have you lost a son?" she asked, quickly raising the stranger's left hand. "Ah!" (finding the finger ringless) "not married, and yet, young as you are, you have suffered. If your sufferings were worse than mine, tell me about them, and maybe, in some way, I shall take comfort by the hearing."

Mary drew the weary body to a chair, seeing how weak and wasted the mourner appeared after her silent days of vigil.

"Sit down, Mrs. Cray, and I will kneel beside you. There, that's better. Keep your head on my shoulder. See, I can hold you tightly in my arms, so that your sorrow shall be my sorrow, and we will share the burden together, just we two—who have both tasted loss."

Mrs. Cray obeyed, wiping away her streaming tears, which were falling on Mary's cloak. Again she asked in a broken undertone:

"Who are you?"

Mary ignored the question, for, after all, it mattered so little. Had she not said she was a friend? Instead she spoke of the one who had gone, leaving the house desolate for the mother who loved him.

"Your son," she murmured, "died in bed, enveloped by your care, respected, regretted, honored in life, revered in death. If he asked for a cup of cold water, you were there to place it to his lips; if he moved a muscle of his body, soft cushions made the moving easier. Is this not so?"

Mrs. Cray nodded her head emphatically, clasping her hands as if in gratitude to an unseen Providence.

"Nothing was denied him, thank God!" she muttered. "I gave him everything he wanted, no gentleman could have had more. Mr. James and some of the rich folk sent grapes, wine and flowers nearly every day toward the end. He loved the flowers best. At the last he talked to them as if they were people, fancying they breathed life into his body, and he described the most beautiful visions."

Mary turned her pale face to the mourner, and now it appeared so strangely sad that all the tragedy of earth—all the great history of suffering from the beginning of the world, seemed to lurk in the depths of those pain-fraught eyes.

"The one I loved," she said, "died out in the open—hungry, thirsty, tortured. No pillowed bed, no word of love, no earthly succor. During long hours, torn in the body, heavy in spirit—forsaken—facing death without fear, without complaint, thinking only of others, though racked with unspeakable agony. His death stands out as a great and priceless sacrifice."

Mary's voice grew faint and low; it seemed to echo round the room like a silver bell. Suddenly the mourner in the house found herself soothing and supporting the stranger from the street, returning the embrace which drew them together in the bonds of a twin grief. Mrs. Cray spoke soothingly, as she stroked Mary's hand, in an effort to bring comfort.

"There! There!—poor creature, it was wrong of me to let you talk of it, but you see my own trouble made me selfish, that's often the way, I fear. I expect it was your lover, since you are so well favored and still unwed. I can guess, too, how the brave lad met his death, most like out in South Africa at the time of the war. Some of our young men from Abbotts Brooke lay

suffering for hours on the field of battle, and those who lived to come home could tell rare tales of those terrible times."

Mary bowed her head.

"You are right," she said; "it was on the field of battle."

Mrs. Cray sought in her mind for suitable words of consolation, and this was the first effort she had made for others since her own loss.

"But you must try and remember that his death won a victory, dearie," she murmured, "a victory for a country any soldier might be proud of."

Mary's beautiful face shone suddenly with a smile that even in the dim light cast its brilliancy upon the speaker.

"Yes—and such a victory—a willing offering of self, without a murmur or regret. But you know it is not only the heroes of war that leave us glad and proud. We see the splendid martyrs of little homes, dying with heroic courage, and the mothers, who rise up to work, though their hearts break. You are only desolate because this present cloud has blinded your eyes. If you would but look, there are children at your very door, a whole world full of children to mother and help. Perhaps you can give them nothing better than a smile, yet that smile sends a ray of sunshine straight from the soul, and the earth is a poor place without sunshine. It may cost you an effort, but the joy of the effort will help and sustain your fainting spirit, and the outpouring of your love is in reality the love your boy in heaven gives back to you for those who need it here on this earth."

As Mrs. Cray listened she touched Mary's skirt, half wondering if she were awake, conscious that some unseen

power gradually bore her away to new fields of thought, changing her mental condition to one of hope and courage.

"I don't know how it is, miss, but I feel as though I were dreaming. I wonder if you really are here at all, or whether I shall suddenly wake to find the outlook just as forlorn and drear as before you came to put fresh heart into me."

Mary smiled, and the gentle movement of her lips could only be seen dimly.

"The light is rather mysterious," she said, "but we shall meet again very soon. I am staying at Rutherwyke Place. I have work to do there and at Abbotts Brooke. You must be tired from lying awake at night, so now please try and sleep, to revive all those weary faculties which still have many tasks before them."

The woman rubbed her eyes; they certainly ached with the pain of ceaseless tears, yet she feared her lonely room above.

"Yes, I am tired, but I can't go to bed," she declared. "The moment I get upstairs I am more wide awake than ever. I shall just lie on this sofa all night and watch the street lamp. At least it is something to look at till the dawn comes. Then I shall see the sky, and at times I fancy the clouds are angel forms, just as I did when a child."

Mary moved to the sofa and shook up the cushions invitingly.

"Let me make you comfortable before I go," she said, "and, if you like, I will stay until you fall asleep. Then I can slip out quite quietly, and though the door will be unlocked, no one is likely to disturb you. Fortunately for us poor people, we have nothing to fear like the rich, with their tempting possessions. They

must bolt their doors, and bar their windows, and even then they tremble at the faintest sound. I, for one, have never envied them their many responsibilities or the power money brings."

Mrs. Cray allowed herself to be led to the old-fashioned red rep couch, which Mary, with a few magic touches, made almost luxurious.

"Now, lie down and close your eyes," said the kindly voice, "and repeat to yourself: 'I must sleep, I will sleep, because there is so much work to do in the morning for my large family the world.' "

The woman obeyed, since Mary's manner possessed a wealth of persuasion which paralyzed denial. It seemed as if the stranger focussed her mind with mesmeric force on Mrs. Cray's excited brain and sleepless eyes.

"I know," murmured the widow, "that in the morning I shall find it was only a dream, and I shall never see you again. The waking is the worst part; I sleep to forget, and the coming back is so cruel it almost kills me. I sometimes think it is God's vengeance because"—she paused and drew a deep breath, then added dreamily—"because we crucified His Son."

The room was very silent and Mary made no sound, hardly appearing to breathe as she stood looking down upon exhausted human nature, her eyes moist with tears.

Presently she loosened her cloak, and drawing it from her shoulders, spread the long garment over Mrs. Cray's recumbent figure. Already the sufferer had temporarily escaped from her sorrow and lay wrapped in the mystery of sleep.

"You will find the cloak in the morning," Mary whispered, without rousing the unconscious form. "Then

you will know it was not a dream. You will remember me and believe the evidence of your own sight."

She stretched out both her hands in an attitude of blessing, just as she had done when approaching the village. They were strangely fragile for the hands of a garden worker. Thus she remained for a few brief moments, her lips murmuring a prayer. As the clock struck ten she moved to the door, with slow backward steps, still keeping her eyes riveted upon the sofa, as if that lingering gaze induced the sleep so much required, persisting in a vigorous order of thought strong enough to influence the sleeper long after Mary returned to the White Cottage.

Gently she raised the latch and passed, with the noiseless movement of a shadow, to the silent village beneath the stars.

CHAPTER VI

THE OTHER WALKER IN THE GARDEN

"I CAN'T believe it is true," said Mrs. Penreath. "Surely Vines must have been mistaken. How could an absolute stranger import another person's child to our cottage without asking permission? It hardly sounds likely, for Constance gave Miss Aquila such a very good character."

"Vines seemed pretty sure about it, anyhow," declared Arrow, lighting a cigar. "Of course, it means we shall have that foul-mouthed, gin-sodden Mrs. Benn brawling in the garden to-morrow, to say nothing of the dirt her young hopeful will bring to the place, just as it has been thoroughly cleaned and done up in honor of the newcomer."

Mrs. Penreath sipped her after-dinner coffee with a thoughtful expression, nodding assent as she listened to her husband's prophecy.

"I do think," she replied, "it was taking a great liberty. I can't help feeling that for some reason or other Constance Eastlake must have become infatuated with this Mary Aquila and has perhaps spoiled her. I shall make it quite plain we cannot let Sam Benn remain. In fact, I have a great mind to walk to the cottage now, though I should not have wished to intrude the first evening, but she has brought it on herself by her strange behavior. If you would come with me, I should quite

enjoy a stroll. You can wait outside, while I interview Mary and sift this matter to the bottom. I do not mean to stand any nonsense from her. I shall merely say that the child is to be taken back to his mother early to-morrow morning and never allowed in our grounds again. Why, it seems he was regularly kidnaped under Mrs. Benn's eyes, while she protested loudly, quite a disgraceful scene! Surely the law could prevent a person detaining another woman's child, even if the mother happens to be a drunkard?"

Arrow laughed, for Vines had fully described the incident, even repeating some of Sam's quaint remarks about the Lion's Claw.

"It evidently caused rather a sensation," replied the artist, "but I suppose Miss Aquila is strong-minded, for apparently she had no intention of relinquishing Sam. You remember the Eastlakes said she was so fond of children. This is a bad start off with the much-praised protégée, of whom we expected such great things. But it must have been funny to see Vines and the woman he was prepared to hate, followed through Abbotts Brooke by Mrs. Benn shouting, 'Stop thief!' while Mary Aquila calmly walked off with young Sam, without leave or authority. Poor Vines blushed as he told me the story, though he spoke entirely in her favor and seemed to think her quite a heroine. She undoubtedly won him over at first sight. The pretty face, I suspect, was a strong weapon and made him forget his prejudice against lady gardeners."

Josephine put down a shell-like cup she was holding and touched the bell.

"Take care, Arrow, that Mary doesn't get round you. I should say you were far more susceptible than poor, hardworking Vines."

He blew a smoke cloud into the air contemplatively, trying to picture Mary's Madonna-like features and mysterious fascination.

"Thank goodness! I have a wife who is capable of protecting me against a dozen lady gardeners if occasion demanded. By the way, I think the Eastlake School of Gardening was at one time quite an amusement to Max. I drew him out on the subject when he was here; his revelations proved rather amusing and might have surprised Constance. The students were pretty lively until Mary came, when suddenly the whole tone of the place altered, and they all went cracked over their work, so poor old Max retired from the gardens, somewhat disappointed. The general improvement made things dull for him, the good-looking idlers had changed into busy bees and no longer troubled to talk to the long-limbed motorist."

A servant appeared in answer to Mrs. Penreath's summons and Josephine raised her hand ever so slightly to motion Arrow into silence. She had always mildly disapproved of Max Eastlake and his unconventional ideas.

"Tell Wales to bring my boa and open the garden door if the shutters are closed."

She gave the order as her husband rose with a look of mild surprise that she really intended visiting Mary at this late hour.

"Then you do mean to descend on Miss Aquila tonight?" he queried. "You really think Sam's presence warrants an intrusion?"

Josephine nodded assent, she had definitely made up her mind. "I think it may have a wholesome effect. I am not going from curiosity, but simply because I feel outraged at the thought of the uninvited guest con-

taminating our cottage with dirt germs. I want also to see if Mary is mad, and to-morrow I shall write to Constance."

A stern note rang in Josephine's voice and her lips hardened as they closed.

It was quite a journey from the dining-room, through the library, to the garden door. Josephine held herself proudly as she made a tour of the long picturesque rooms which led to the far end of a square hall.

In the distance the wide staircase, dimly lighted by shaded lamps, looked ghostly and imposing. Monster birds, carved at the foot of the banisters, formed silent sentries, keeping guard over beautiful old furniture and huge tapestry pictures framed in massive black oak.

Mrs. Penreath was not robust and generally feared the evening air, seldom accompanying her husband, who, even on cold dark nights, often wandered in the lonely garden to rest his brain after a long day's work. Occasionally, when commencing a picture, he slept in his studio, close to the canvas, on an eastern divan, and during the night received inspiration from slumber on this unaccustomed bed, with windows set wide open and moonlight flooding the room.

Fortunately Josephine paid no heed to the wildest eccentricities. "Genius," she said, "was its own excuse," and watched the development of her husband's skill with absorbing interest, without ever seeking to hamper him by her own wishes or desires.

As he opened the door for her to pass out she paused on the threshold with a little gasp of wonder. The night air blew upon her with a warm sweetness she had hardly expected in the uncertain month of May, bringing memories of fiery July, sinking beneath the sobering touch of evening. She thought instinctively of foreign

summers long ago, when first she met Arrow in a land of romance, where peasants moved like gods and women bore baskets of fruit on their heads with the stately carriage of queens. Those happy hours seemed strangely far away, called back across a vista of years by the soft seductive atmosphere.

It was a strangely still night and distant echoes vibrated with startling clearness through the grounds. She fancied the garden was peopled by light-footed visitants from another world. Nothing looked material; all the old familiar objects appeared etherealized and unreal, permeated by some spiritualizing element. She fancied the stars lay reflected on the paths and long stretches of shadow-lined lawn, bathing the grass in unearthly beauty, kissing the closed buds of sleeping flowers and scattering jewels everywhere.

The thickly clothed trees in the Monk's Walk shone with beams of light that darted in and out of their silvery foliage; every nook and corner appeared mysteriously alive with the whispering spirit of the night.

"Take my arm, Arrow," she said. "The garden is too lonely and wonderful for mere human beings; it is so dreamlike, every moment I expect it to fade away. Don't you feel as if we might meet a phantom procession of monastic figures or hear them chanting as we pass the site where the chapel once stood? I could imagine all the old scenes materializing in this strangely clear atmosphere. It is a night to remember; it gives me back my youth."

She could not explain the sudden sense of happiness which possessed her, the renewal of girlish sensations, the glad beating of a heart quickened by some emotional energy.

Arrow, too, felt surprised at the resplendent glory of

the scene. He had noticed often enough a phosphorescent glow peculiar to Rutherwyke, but to-night the charm of evening was intensified. The stars were in the grass and the moon was a goddess, sporting with shadowy monks in the misty meshes of leaves. Even to Josephine, who knew it all so well, the garden became fantastic, visionary. The subtle enchantment of her surroundings held her spellbound. Her eyes sought Arrow's suddenly with an almost roguish glance as if she, too, contemplated joining those elusive spirits in the shadowy landscape. Her steps were young and light, full of a new elasticity, buoyant and unhampered by any thought of age. She moved as gracefully as when she drifted like a snowflake up the aisle of a fashionable London church to be joined in wedlock to the rising young painter, whose pictures had already been praised and purchased by an appreciative public. Even then Arrow felt sure that in years to come Josephine's special type of beauty would retain the charm which time appeared incapable of sapping. To-night she wore a dress of frail design and delicately colored transparency, a harmonious blending of deep violet and faint mauve. Arrow's critical glance observed that her small satin shoes matched the shade of the gossamer gown, and a scent clung to her boa, borrowed from the fragrance of violet beds. The whole effect was so uniformly pleasant and suggestive of refinement that it delighted him instinctively.

He could not help feeling that perhaps it was just a little cruel of Josephine to burst upon Mary, the homely worker, gorgeous in fairy-like draperies, with neck bare and arms veiled only by diaphanous tulle. It would mark the difference between the woman toiling for a wage and the butterfly of fashion, able to nurse

her youth and enhance her beauty by lavish expenditure. But evidently Josephine guessed nothing of his thought nor felt a qualm of conscience as she hurried through the grounds of mystery and silver light. Once the hooting of a brown owl overhead set her heart beating faster, and she leaned a little more heavily on Arrow, quickening her steps toward the cottage.

"Though you look so fair and innocent," he said, "you are just spoiling for a fight. Oh! I know you women!"

Josephine still shivered at the recollection of the owl's shrill cry, though her lips smiled.

"Oh! don't, Arrow; it sounds so horrid. Am I like that?"

She raised her daintily penciled eyebrows.

"Like what?" he queried.

"Like the females described as 'you women'? Why not say at once 'you cats'?"

He laughed softly, turning to her with a ready answer.

"Well, have you not come out to scratch? Cats on moonlight nights generally take the opportunity of a little warfare. Mary has offended—remember, this is no errand of peace."

Josephine glanced nervously behind her, then traced their shadows with widely opened eyes and lips slightly parted as if in fear.

"It seemed so easy to be angry in the dining-room," she said, "but out here the night alters everything. On such a heavenly evening it makes one almost ashamed of any but happy thoughts. Still you know it was impertinent——"

"Oh! it was."

"And she had no right——"

"No right at all."

"Arrow, I believe you are making fun of me. If you go on like this, I shall never be able to show Mary how very unwisely she has behaved. You won't laugh when you find Mrs. Benn prostrated in a drunken lethargy among your favorite flowers. It is absurd for us to be made fools of by a romantic moon!"

"Or a romantic lady gardener, either. You are quite right, Josephine, Mary must be told that dirty children cannot be harbored at the White Cottage."

He tried to speak seriously, but the atmosphere of the garden sent strong appeals to the imagination, and Arrow knew that his voice spoke in direct contradiction to his heart. Strange that he had often walked at night through these same shaded groves and winding paths, without hearing the whispering voices of sprites and elves—without seeing angel faces in the moonbeams, smiling welcome, shedding their benediction from flower-bells or bending boughs. The change must be in himself. Josephine would naturally feel much the same as usual, so Josephine should play moral policeman, while he remained outside, dreaming—in a garden of dreams.

As they neared the cottage Josephine spoke again.

"Do you see, Arrow, the door is open and there's just one light burning, no more? She cannot be reading or writing, perhaps, like us, she is just enjoying the moon—and the poetical stillness."

Quickening her steps, the speaker reached the portal of Mary's new home and knocked a trifle diffidently.

Arrow hung back in the shadows and felt from habit for his pipe, which he fingered and forgot to smoke.

Receiving no answer, Josephine pushed the door open and beckoned her husband. He advanced slowly, drawn by curiosity.

"Isn't that sweet?"

She whispered the words, pointing to an object in the room.

Close by the open window two easy chairs, placed together, formed a bed, and asleep on a plentiful supply of pillows lay a golden-haired boy, with one small arm hanging out, bare to the elbow.

"Look," she continued, "look at the child with the infant Samuel face! Who can it be? Not young Benn; he was never beautiful."

Arrow drew nearer.

"It is young Benn," he answered shortly. "Don't you realize, Josephine, this is Mary's doing? She has rescued him to some purpose. She has waved her magic wand and transformed the dirtiest little devil into a veritable child-angel."

Josephine bent lower over the sleeping boy. She traced the delicate curve of his cheek, the milk-white neck, and the hair—all gold, in a flood of bright strands, swept out upon the pillow. She saw, with wondering gaze, a triumph over what had been, a revelation of what could be. Fragrance filled the air, everything smelled fresh, wholesome, pure. The little hand moved and the nails shone clean as shells tossed up from the sea. The eyelids quivered, fringed by long lashes, the deep ebony of thunder clouds against the gold of sunset, hair of amber, lashes dark as night. "Benn's brat," glorified, resourceful from disfiguring dirt, to a cherub in a Raphael picture.

"All alone," murmured Josephine. "Where can Mary be?"

Her voice, though low, apparently reached the child in dreamland.

Sam moved and murmured softly: "Go on singing."

Arrow looked at his wife, and his eyes wore a tender expression.

"It is long since you sang to Oliver," he whispered, his thoughts traveling to their son at Cambridge, once a little fair-haired, dimpled boy, the only admirer who ever asked Josephine to sing twice. Though her speaking voice was musical enough, she had no ear for tune.

Sam opened his eyes, gazing with mute astonishment at the vision in evening dress. It was so new, so marvelous to see soft draperies, with flash of jewels on an uncovered neck, that he kicked off the bedclothes and sat upright, hugging a pair of pink knees, revealing rose-leaf toes, gleaming from their new alliance with soap-suds. Then suddenly taking courage, he snatched at a rope of pearls Josephine always wore and held them lovingly against his face.

"What are they?" he asked, half afraid to question his mysterious visitor. "What are these little round balls, if you please? Did you get them at the toy shop in Egham?"

The woman knelt down, that he might take a larger handful of the cool, pale treasure.

"They come from the sea," she whispered, "deep down where the mermaids live."

Sam looked puzzled. Now he pressed them to his lips, and a rapt expression made the baby eyes strangely attractive.

"What is the sea?" he asked.

Josephine sighed. At that age Oliver had paddled on many sunny stretches of sand and wallowed in the playful summer waves. She looked at her husband for an answer, feeling that he might explain that great restless element in which the pearls were born.

"Arrow, what is the sea?"

The artist stood back, conscious that Josephine and the boy made an exquisite picture, narrowing his eyes as he replied:

"The sea is a voice drawing the rivers of the earth to her eternal orchestra. The sea is a monster which devours or a child who sleeps. Sometimes she is a woman, with heaving breast and eyes of blue, a mother, a queen—star-crowned, or a traitress, calling those who love her to death's feast. She holds in her heart every emotion of life, torments and joys, loss, storms, sorrow, poetry, kisses, despair. She is a mausoleum and a playhouse, she is wild, she is still, she is false, she is true. She is God and the devil in one."

Josephine was settling Sam among the pillows, and already his eyes had closed again. He heard nothing of Arrow's words, spoken low, merely for his own satisfaction and the ear of Josephine.

"Poor child, he would not understand your definition," she murmured. "Evidently Mary has felt the call of the night like ourselves and must be taking a stroll. Let us go back before she returns. She is welcome to the infant Samuel, if she keeps him sweet and clean. Only look at the gloss on his hair, just like spun silk."

Josephine bent down and kissed the slumbering face.

"It would have been lonely for Mary on this her first evening but for Sam," she added thoughtfully. "I am glad she has a companion."

Arrow picked up the boa fallen from his wife's shoulders and wrapped it about her neck, noting the softened expression.

"Yes," he replied, "very lonely," drawing Josephine away. "Come quickly, we don't want to meet her now if the child is to remain. I should feel like an intruder, violating some sacred shrine. The cottage is Mary's

home, the boy—treasure-trove. What right have we to interfere?"

Josephine passed out into the moonlight, glancing back at the perfect picture of innocent childhood in the white room, where the moonbeams strayed.

For a moment she did not speak, perhaps her heart was too full, and she felt guilty at the remembrance of her previous displeasure. At last she said:

"Mary must be a nice woman to have cared for Sam. There is an atmosphere about the place, Arrow, which makes me think I shall like her after all. Do you know what Constance said? She told me to think of her words when the Madonna lilies bloom. She said that Mary looked like the Virgin Mother herself—come to life."

Arrow never scoffed at a poetical fancy.

"Mary has the mother instinct, judging by the transformation of 'Benn's brat' to a pink and white cherub. She is a worker of miracles, for she has even broken down your prejudice, won you over without a word. The Madonna lilies never did well here. It remains to be seen if they bloom at all this year; Monk rather despaired of them. It is a pity the soil does not suit their peculiar temperament, for they are my favorite flowers. Nothing can beat the beautiful old white lily, which dates from the sixteenth century."

Josephine agreed. She, too, loved the regal purity and sacred association of the flower which suited the old-world garden of Rutherwyke to perfection. She pictured the wide lily borders which in scarcity of bloom so often disappointed their expectations.

"Perhaps Mary will be more successful than Monk, though he certainly tried hard," she murmured, willing to give him his due. "He grew them in rich prepared

ground and in natural soil. He knew they were very near your heart, and I must say, with all his subsequent faults, he always studied your tastes; he did his utmost for the garden."

Arrow agreed, for her words were undoubtedly just, though he still smarted under the memory of the man's dishonest dealing.

"Rogues and vagabonds frequently have ingratiating manners and appear exemplary characters until they are found out," he added, harping back to the old grievance. "Why, it seems almost sacrilegious to expect that Monk could succeed with Madonna lilies. To me they are flowers with a soul and a special history of their own. Did you know they were first imported when St. Mary was no longer venerated in England?"

As he spoke a faint footfall could be heard in the adjoining pathway, but a hedge of holly divided Arrow and his wife from the other walker in the garden.

"Hush!" whispered Josephine, hurrying toward the house and not daring to look back.

"It must have been Mary," said the artist, with a sudden desire to see the newcomer.

Josephine took his arm again and leaned upon it weakly.

"Mary—or somebody else. You forget, spirits are abroad to-night."

A faint mist crept across the lawn, a mist which blotted out the silver moonshine and made ghostly tracks down the Monk's Walk. Lights from the house gleamed warmly through welcoming windows. Josephine thought of her easy chair and the novel she had meant to read that evening.

"I shall be glad to get in now," she said. "It is turning cold." She did not know at that very moment

Mary was closing the cottage door, leaving the garden lonely, leaving the garden wrapped in a sea of vapor.

Sam felt she had returned without opening his eyes, though she made no sound. He just murmured "Sing again"—and Mary sang. But her eyes were sad as she thought of the bereaved woman asleep beneath her cloak. She heard the shrill cry of the brown owl and saw the pale face of the mist through her window. But Sam only heard, as he believed, the distant voice of an angel visitant singing in the spheres. Far away the curses of the woman who called him "son"—far away the Lion's Claw! Mary was his mother now, the White Cottage his home. Beautiful women who smiled made up the kingdom of his childish dreams.

"Sing again—again—again," he whispered drowsily, and the song changed to a kiss and the kiss to a longing sigh. Then all was still, save the soft ticking of the clock as Mary moved away, shading the candle with her hand.

CHAPTER VII

PASSION FLOWERS

THE ringing of the Gabriel bell woke Arrow Penreath early the following morning. He listened to its persistent note with keenly appreciative ears. Its deep tone held music and song, heralding the day with sacred thoughts, the Angelus of old England, a prayer, a veneration, pleasing his fancy, and soothing, while it roused. It had become part of Rutherwyke, a sound so familiar that it made home. The bell's voice was a friend, a companion, and he loved to dwell on its ancient origin, to tell of its baptism, when long ago, for the service of the Church, it had been anointed with holy oil. It recalled the monastic associations redolent of the soil upon which Rutherwyke was built.

Arrow was just in the throes of conceiving a new, allegorical picture; the planning of the scheme made him wakeful, restless, impatient. Yesterday he had sent for Vines at breakfast to ask if there were any passion flowers out in the conservatories, as he wanted them for his work, only to hear the buds were not worth picking and would not open for some days.

This morning the artist resolved to look for himself. It angered him that Nature should thwart his desire, and he could not help thinking perhaps jealousy of Monk made Vines belittle the vast quantity of bloom, both under glass and out in the grounds. Dressing

quickly near the open window, Arrow realized the garden of sunbeams called with even greater attraction than the night before, though its beauty was less subtle, more of earth, and proud vigorous growth. Now it cried to his artist's soul with the radiant sparkle of waking light and the glory of morning resurrection. The dew-drenched flowers stood up, rejuvenated by their fragrant bath, while birds clamored boisterously for the joys of life and the slaughter of insect existence. Around the climbing roses reaching to his casement hum of tiny winged creatures and persistent drone of bee contrasted strangely with the ghostly stillness of the previous evening.

He was glad to go out fasting into the garden, for slight hunger sharpened his senses and brought him nearer to the world which knew not the language of words, but expressed its being in song and sound. He felt in sympathy with the virgin freshness of the newborn day, over which birds noisily rejoiced as if indeed they had only just come into their summer kingdom.

He had not thought of Mary Aquila as he wended his way to the long stretch of glass where forced and sheltered flowers grew. He liked to believe flowers were living personalities, and he always experienced a sensation of pity for hothouse blossoms. To come into existence, without ever meeting the kiss of the wind or the dews of night, without seeing the dawn break, without knowing the free skies and open air, this was the fate of the exotic, forced by the will of man. He opened the door of the conservatory where the purple passion flowers made their home, and as he did so a gentle figure, gowned simply in a robe of deep rich blue, turned to him and smiled good-morning. Just for a moment Arrow spoke no word. Mary's beauty was so spirituelle that it

took away his breath and held him dumb with overpowering admiration. He experienced the startled sensation he would have expected to feel in the presence of an unearthly visitant suddenly materializing before the wondering gaze of mortal eyes. He fancied he saw around her the filmy vapor of a cloud and a faint yet unmistakable blue light. He put his hand to his forehead, as if to collect his scattered senses. For a moment he could not speak, only he noticed that the passion flowers, which slumbered yesterday, were well awake this morning.

Full open leaves bloomed around Mary in purple profusion, as if her presence endowed them with mysterious strength; even the weakly plants gave forth an offering of prodigal blossom. Apparently she read his thoughts and knew the reason of his coming.

"You want the passion flowers," she said. "See, they are ready for you." Then in explanation of her knowledge added quickly, "Vines told me you would require some for a picture as soon as possible."

Arrow drew a step nearer. Her voice puzzled him even more than the Madonna-like beauty he had expected. Something in its rich, yet well modulated fulness made him think of the Gabriel bell ringing its "Hail Mary!" to the distant village, ignorant of the message the chimes proclaimed.

He forgot they were strangers, forgot that possibly she might expect some conventional questions, and turning to the flowers, gazed at them reverently.

"I can't help thinking they have come out for you," he said. "Surely it is right and fit that passion flowers should bloom for Mary."

Already he was criticizing her beauty favorably, say-

ing in his heart that undoubtedly the new lady gardener must be converted into a model.

He watched her stoop toward the flowers and gaze into their open faces, tracing each strange and delicate petal, reading perchance the story they told of "agony and bloody sweat." He felt sure she was dwelling on the mystery of the Passion from the rapt expression in her eyes.

"You know what it all means," said Arrow, speaking low. "The leaves represent the spear, the tendrils the cords with which our Lord was scourged, and the ten petals are the ten Apostles who deserted Him."

Mary bent lower over the climbing plant, which mounted to the roof of the conservatory. Tenderly she touched the central pillar of the flower that told of pain.

"This," she murmured, "is the Cross."

Arrow fancied her voice sounded far away, like the Angelus heard across space in distant hills and hidden vales.

"Yes"—he plucked a full-blown specimen as he spoke, holding it to the light. "The stamens are the hammers, the styles the nails and the inner circles round the center the crown of thorns. We have some white passion flowers in the other house; the white hue is typical of innocence, but the blue shade, which I prefer, is a symbol of heaven. I dare say you know the passion flower only remains open for three days and then dies, but this is said to represent the death, burial and resurrection of the crucified One."

Mary turned her face away, but not before Arrow noticed her peculiarly sensitive mouth, with the little tremble at the corners and the look in her eyes which baffled even his quick intelligence.

"Every flower," she said, "has some story written

in its petals, only they are not so easily read. One must know them well to divine their secrets. I have lived among them long enough perhaps to see more than the casual passer-by. The passion flower speaks of cruel torture and is transparent in its meaning, but the others tell of resurrection. They are all symbols of heaven, whatever their color or shape."

Arrow listened attentively. It was not so much her ideas which arrested his interest as the simplicity of her manner, amazing in one so beautiful. Could she possibly be unaware of Nature's dazzling gift?

"I hope you like Rutherwyke," he said, plain conventional words, yet spoken with a depth of sincerity and meaning. He really wanted her to appreciate the home he loved and the garden, which meant so much to him in leisure hours, when his tired working brain needed mental refreshment and a calm, still scene.

Mary did not reply at once, but continued her work in the conservatory, which his entrance had momentarily suspended. Then, as if bracing herself to an effort, she answered candidly:

"I do not like the Gabriel bell."

The reply fell like lead upon his ear.

Here was a woman with the face of a Madonna, here was "Mary," the namesake of the Virgin Mother, actually saying in her calm, clear tones: "I do not like the Gabriel bell."

The unexpected announcement came with a sense of shock and disappointment. For a moment his illusions were rudely shattered.

She could see the cloud which rose upon his brow, darkening eyes usually so bright and observant with just sufficient sparkle to indicate their owner's appreciation of life's humorous side. Now they were grave and

openly reproachful as they returned Mary's steady look.

"I wonder," he said, "why it does not appeal to you? At first sight I summed you up as having a soul above the commonplace. I could have sworn that the ringing of the Angelus would meet with your approval. I am not often mistaken in my hastily formed impressions and should be curious to hear your reason for disliking the bell."

Mary paid no heed to the injured tone which crept into his retort. Arrow had grown accustomed to laudation and the praise of a celebrity-worshiping world. His success gave him the close friendship and attentive ear of men and women in high social positions. He was intimate, through his genius, with royal patrons, who felt honored to welcome him as their guest. In his own heart Arrow Penreath, with his outwardly easy manner, his pipe and his genial smile, was a little god unto himself. Not even his wife, living at his side, watching him daily with the keen eyes of affection, knew the pinnacle upon which he placed his own brain and imagination. At times he would amuse himself by descending to the level of some very ordinary mortal, talking of mundane matters as if they formed the limit of his horizon, telling himself it was a rest, an act of charity, a soothing antidote to his usual brilliancy. In this hidden act of condescension he touched the high-water mark of secret pride.

Now he waited for Mary to give some explanation. Seeing she could not escape the direct question, she caught her breath in a half-stifled sigh and spoke with quick emphasis, meeting his gaze fully.

"The Angelus," she said, "has always been rung by man to venerate the one woman who would most keenly

have desired to escape veneration. The Virgin Mary wanted no prominence in her life, she sought no praise, but dwelt in humble retirement, only looking from afar at the greatness of her Lord. The very thought of being held up as an object of worship would have tormented her quiet, retiring spirit, possibly even disturbing (if such things could be) her eternal rest. Was she not content to sit apart in silence, offering no word for the ages which were to come, willing that history should be written in which she is but the simple handmaid of the Lord? Did she not, after becoming the instrument of Divine Power, wed with Joseph and live as his wife, bearing him children? If future generations throughout the centuries were intended to fall down and pray to her as a glorified saint, placing her on a pinnacle with God and the Redeemer, would not her Son during His ministry, on His Cross, or after He rose from the tomb, have told His disciples to come to Him through Mary, to hail her as an object of devotion? But He alone could read all the simplicity of her heart. He saw her, knew her, loved her as she was, the Maid who laid her Baby in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. During those days in a poor man's house Joseph's wife could never dream that her image would rank with the Cross itself, that the world would set her up as an idol, falling at her feet in adoration and prayer. She was contented to be just 'woman.' She asked for nothing more. So now, you see, it is merely out of pity for her that I do not like the Gabriel bell."

If the stranger's words astonished Arrow, her face, as she spoke, revealed such real emotion that it filled him with even greater amazement. Her lips were merely framing the thought which lighted her eyes with strange, almost uncanny, radiance. Her expression

varied from humility to a certain righteous anger, but for the holy fires in that unfathomable gaze. It was the face of an outraged saint, smarting beneath injury. The fancy she expressed came as no mere casual reply to Arrow's question; it was the following up of an idea which must have grown and formed in her mind long before this early morning meeting with the master of Rutherwyke. Partly because the subject interested him and partly because he liked to watch the coming and going of Mary's color and the vital expression of her features, he continued the conversation, with his glance riveted upon the blue gowned figure.

"Personally," he said, "I find the whole idea of the devotion to our Lady is full of beauty and romance. A modern writer has said: 'The worship of the Mother of God rose upon the Church like the moon rising into a sky already studded with stars, which from henceforth, though still bright and visible, became as nothing compared with the greater and more splendid luminary.' That 'splendid luminary' has been shining on the world ever since the early Christians did not scruple to ask the aid of the gracious Mother. I have studied the history of its progress pretty closely, and it has always held for me an irresistible fascination. The first regular office of the Blessed Virgin was used daily by the Benedictines of Monte Casino in the ninth century. I can lend you my books of reference on the subject. You can trace the worship down an unbroken line of years; it clings fast, it came to stay. All services to our Lady are pre-eminently joyful, and the most homely of the old English devotions were the Five Wounds of our Lord and the Five Joys of our Blessed Lady. These, however, accumulate into various and numerous joys, which dazzle the brain with a medley of poetical repeti-

tion. Her Seven Heavenly Joys, her Twelve Joys and her Fifteen Joys. Lansperg composed a Rosary of the Fifty Joys of our Lady. So, you see, it was a popular devotion, and she, who you say is contented to be 'just woman,' reigns with undying sway in the hearts of her devotees."

Arrow reeled out his information with an inward sense of cruelty. He wondered why he liked to hurt this beautiful woman, to bring pain to her face and a deprecating expression to those extraordinarily speaking eyes. Possibly the artist in him, seeking copy, placed her on the rack, that he might indulge his talent by the vision of her suffering. He wished he could have caught upon canvas all those eyes were saying, as he talked quickly, with the flow of conversation natural to him.

Mary placed one hand on the stem of a passion flower, but her fingers remained motionless, and the flower appeared so still, it seemed impossible a human touch could rest upon it, however light the pressure. She was looking down into the heart of the bloom wistfully, as if to read some secret in its purple chalice. At last she said with a little catch in her throat:

"Tell me some of the Joys, if you can remember them."

Her words held more of command than request. They thrilled Arrow strangely, for indeed the music of the Gabriel bell lurked in Mary's voice with a vigorous note of appeal and mastery. He could not refuse the request, though he felt somewhat ashamed of his merciless attitude.

"Yes, I will tell you," he answered, aware that this woman was in some subtle way drawing him out, making him for once less conscious of his own individuality. It was new to Arrow to meet a spirit—feminine—quiet,

sweet, yet strong, which baffled the ego in himself. Mary's voice, while it expressed conflicting views, moved him, not as other women's voices, but with a strange sense of passionless admiration and almost reverential wonder. When he said, "I will tell you," her hand fell to her side, and as it fell the passion flower drooped with sorrow at the loss of the light caressing touch. "The Seven Heavenly Joys," he murmured, looking beyond her to the pale morning sunlight playing among the fern leaves, "are these:

"Our Lady's surpassing glory.

"Her brightness, which lights the whole Court of Heaven.

"All the host of heaven obeys and honors her.

"Her Divine Son and she herself have but one will.

"God rewards at her pleasure all her clients both here and hereafter.

"She sits next to the Most Holy Trinity and her body is glorified.

"Her certainty that these joys will last forever."

Arrow marked off each joy on his outstretched fingers. He fancied they were seven stabs to the one who listened, believing so firmly that the Maid, to whom Gabriel brought a revelation of miraculous motherhood, would bitterly have condemned the adoration laid at her shrine.

Mary Aquila stood with lips parted in unspoken protest. He could see by the very attitude of her figure and the appealing position of expressive hands how much his recitation distressed her.

Arrow drew a step nearer. Just for a moment he half feared she might fade before his eyes and that he would awake to find himself asleep over the studio fire. Mary's strangely ethereal presence often imparted this

dreamlike sensation to those who saw her for the first time.

"The Seven Heavenly Joys," he continued in the same triumphant tone, conquering the sympathy his heart was in danger of giving, "are associated with the memory of St. Thomas of Canterbury. Our Lady herself revealed this devotion to him, and subsequently he composed the hymn:

'Gaude flore Virginali
Quæ honore principali
Transcendis splendiferum.'

"One of the great windows of Canterbury Cathedral, destroyed at the time of the Commonwealth, represented the Seven Joys, with the 'Blissful Martyr' and the patron saints of England. The influence, you know, of the Virgin's name also extends to plants and flowers. The blue forget-me-not in France is called 'les yeux de notre Dame.' We grow them here by the lake, and even Monk, our late gardener, knew them as 'the eyes of our Lady.' "

Arrow plucked a piece of maidenhair fern and laid it lovingly against his cheek. "This," he continued, "is said to have been previously named 'our Lady's hair'; and even the common yellow buttercup was once 'our Lady's bowl.' I can mention a plant which you may never have heard of in all your gardening experience, Bokhur Miriam, 'the perfume of Mary.' The Persians call it Tchenk Miriam and Pencheh Miriam, 'the hand of Mary.' They say that our Lady, having laid her hand on this plant, left upon it the form of her five fingers, and immediately it gave forth a most delightful fragrance. The Arabs call it Arthanita, but in France it

is named 'the gloves of our Lady.' She has also been likened to a rose in very poetical language: 'Rose of most transcendent beauty, that most fragrant Rose, to whom flew the Heavenly Bee, who feeds among lilies and dwells in the flower-bearing country of the angels, on whom He settled, to whom He clove.' "

Arrow loved to show in speech his possession of a retentive memory. He could quote freely and without effort from the reading of years. Words were photographed in his mind like pictures; for him they held color and light. They were living, forceful companions, friends of solitary hours, breeders of inspiration for his brush. A line quoted was often the forerunner of a famous picture. Frequently he saw a whole scene in a phrase, printed before his mind's eye on the pages of a mythical Academy catalogue. The words would lead him to the bare canvas, which he clothed—on the strength of a poet's rhyme. He thought now that "the flower-bearing country of the angels" materialized into a wondrous painting with the Rose and the Heavenly Bee as symbols of Divinity.

He momentarily forgot that Mary was not in sympathy with his mood, having escaped from her opposing thoughts in the pleasurable act of airing his knowledge. Now she continued her task among the plants and suddenly he asked himself: Had she listened? Was she offended? Perhaps he was treading her prejudices too roughly under foot. Surely Mary could not have forgotten his presence, turning a deaf ear to words that only caused her pain? No, he saw by the flush on her cheek, as she bent to the flowers, that she had heard and suffered in the hearing. A wave of penitence swept over him; he longed to know what was passing in her mind.

"I wish," he said, "you would tell me your thoughts.

I am sorry if I wounded you. I did not mean to really hurt your feelings. It is unwise for people who are likely to meet often to discuss subjects on which they differ, especially at first sight, and religious subjects are the most dangerous of all. But you brought it on yourself by disapproving of the Gabriel bell. I am very loyal to my favorite and the bell holds a special charm for me."

He began picking the passion flowers ruthlessly, tearing them down just as the fancy seized him. He wanted to make a rough sketch that morning to be transferred later to a larger canvas, and a sense of joy possessed him that they were ready for his studio.

Mary paused in her work, meeting his glance fully, so that now he could see again the amazing light in those wonderful eyes, set like lamps in the perfectly modeled face. At last she spoke:

"I knew all you told me, and oh! so much more," she murmured softly. "I want no books to remind me of those many devotions you spoke of. The Virgin Mother has been called 'the gate of heaven,' and men have said none may come to the Friend of sinners but by—Mary. They pray to her to loose their bonds and set them free. They implore her to be a Mother to God and to wretches and to show motherly tenderness to all in need. They forget the Son said: 'I am the Way,' that He never pointed to a mediator. She was chosen by God for a holy task, because the Almighty regarded her lowliness. Through humility and meekness she gained that supreme honor and was selected to be the Mother of the Lord. Was it not enough that she, a creature, brought forth her Maker? She, His servant, took a parent's position and ruled His young years? She sought no further greatness, was offered none. Her cup of gladness filled

to the brim when she held heaven in her arms. But earth claimed her too, and she became just the humble wife of Joseph. You, who pray to her, who rend her heart and outrage her simplicity, remember this, try to look higher—have pity on Joseph's wife!"

Had Mary Aquila been pleading for herself, she could not have spoken with greater feeling. The solemnity of her words was interrupted by the breakfast gong sounding in the garden. It came as a rude upheaval, it broke with its gross insistent call upon sacred thoughts, bringing Arrow sharply back to the world and the flesh. He gathered his sprays of passion flower together in both hands, conscious that the early morning air and vigorous argument had rewarded him with a healthy appetite.

"We will finish our discussion another time, for my wife is very punctual at meals and dislikes to be kept waiting," he said, his thoughts turning to steaming hot coffee and well-fried bacon. "I have enjoyed our exchange of opinions and must thank you for giving me your ideas. Believe me, I shall not forget them."

He looked back as he passed through the door, he looked back as he crossed the lawn and marveled at Mary's strong personality as he glanced again at the armful of passion flowers torn from the conservatory walls with intentional carelessness. He wanted to try the newcomer, to see if she uttered a protest or betrayed horror at his action. He knew under similar circumstances Monk's face would have been a study in disapproval and that finally he would have implored him to desist. But this woman showed no sign of observing Arrow's harsh treatment of the climbing plant. He wondered if her silence arose from indifference or respect. Perhaps she cared little—perhaps she cared

much. He felt quite unable to hazard an opinion. It was also strange that her duties as head of the Rutherwyke gardens had not been mentioned, while instead they discussed a deep subject of controversy, one of undying contention, with the heat and fervor of long-established friendship.

As he neared the house, walking pensively through the dewy grass, Mary's words re-echoed in his brain, chiming like the Gabriel bell—just five words—spoken slowly, softly and with fervor:

"Have pity on Joseph's wife."

Her argument brought a new line of thought to his mind which suddenly controlled him with a strong personal influence, as if a woman's musical voice still whispered in his ear. He pictured the humble origin, the humble life, the humble heart of the Virgin Mary, desiring no weight of glory, seeking no queenship, set up as a divine image, a saintly mediator, disturbed in her death-sleep at Joseph's side by the prayers of centuries, which her woman's spirit had no power to grant or prevent. This theory planted by Mary Aquila took root and sent forth strong branches of resolve. Its speedy growth surprised the artist. His painting—still unborn—should be the fruit of the morning's conversation. He would change the preconceived spirit of the canvas; he would carry Mary's message to the world. How great and good to give utterance to an idea spoken by the sweetest voice ever heard! If Miss Aquila's feelings were indeed so strong as they appeared, might he not in this way induce her to lend her personality, her fair form and radiant face as model and guide?

The thought became an obsession and sent the blood singing to his brain. He was impatient to make desire a reality; he seemed to be on the threshold of a new life.

So engrossed was he with the deep plans of inspiration, that he entered the house mechanically, without seeing Josephine awaiting him in the hall. She smiled patiently into his vacant eyes, accustomed to absent-minded looks and long periods of silence. She knew by the flowers he had already been out in the grounds and took the large bunch from him gently.

"They shall be put into water until you want them in the studio," she said. "I have never seen such splendid passion flowers; the buds were so shriveled and small a few days ago."

In her pale morning gown Josephine looked very youthful as she took her seat contentedly behind the silver coffee-pot. She was a peaceful breakfast companion, always in the same tranquil mood, ready to enjoy the food placed before her and to agree with everything her husband said.

"Did you come across Mary in your early walk?" she asked with natural curiosity.

Arrow nodded assent. He was looking down and Josephine did not notice the slight rising of the color in his cheeks.

"Yes. We met in the conservatory where the passion flowers grow."

Mrs. Penreath paused in her gentle stirring of the liquid in an antique china cup.

"How did she impress you? Is she really so beautiful, Arrow?"

He glanced under his eyelids at the wife whose charms were enhanced by the aid of costly clothes, a well-coiffured head, delicate powders, scented soaps and a maid excelling in massage and manicure, then pictured the worker outside in her plain blue gown, her luxurious hair forming a perfectly natural crown. No butterfly

of fashion could compete with that simple unadorned beauty. His mind was enchained by the spirituality of Mary's presence, the luminous eyes, the strange blending of strength and femininity, the influence she wielded —an influence that was felt. The two women were so utterly different; they bore no comparison. Mary stood alone, like a bright star in a clear blue sky. He could not help recalling his passing thought of the previous night, when, in anticipation, he pitied the newcomer her sight of Josephine in soft draperies and jewels. He knew now she could not have eclipsed the lady gardener in working garb. Mary must always convey the beauty of a dignity which was not of earth, a beauty that made its own light in a setting of mysterious blue.

"She is certainly good looking," he said cautiously, aware the gentler sex were always open to feminine jealousy. "If I could persuade her to sit for me, I should wish for no better model. She has exactly the face and figure I require for the work I hope to commence to-day."

Josephine was quite content with the tone of the reply. Arrow never praised a woman's appearance in a manner to cause her anxiety. He only waxed eloquent where Josephine's charms were concerned. He was a man of the world as well as an artist and knew where happiness lay.

"What shall you name your new picture?" she asked.

It was always the future task that appealed strongly to Josephine. She dwelt upon its growth and progress with a sense of excitement which could not exist for triumphs accomplished or laurels won.

Possibly this attitude had been caught from Arrow. A picture finished never held for him the romance and excitement of work to do.

"Oh! the name," he replied, "that has not been decided yet."

He paused as if in contemplation, then a sudden light broke over his face as once again he heard the thrilling voice of Mary Aquila dominating his thoughts.

"Perhaps," he said, emphasizing the word—"perhaps I shall call it 'Have pity on Joseph's wife.' "

Mrs. Penreath looked puzzled, the sentence conveyed nothing to her mind.

"But what would that mean?" she asked in mystified accents.

Arrow bent forward and his eyes grew bright as he replied:

"I should leave the face in the picture to explain the meaning. The face of the Madonna in new and unexpected guise, horrified at seeing herself modeled in gaudy colors as the saint of sacred shrines—the Madonna, humble, trembling, shrinking back appalled—raising protesting hands—reminding the world that she was 'just woman'—the wife of Joseph. In my picture she asks no throne, seeks no glory. Humble, fear-stricken, misunderstood Mary wishes only to be woman, mother, wife. I shall show the real Mary, whose death has never been written, the Mary whose earth-children knew her only as the simple keeper of their home, the Mary who was subject to man in the days when woman was the weaker vessel."

Josephine rose and put her arms round her husband's neck, drawn by some subtle instinct, eager to show her admiration for his genius.

"Oh! Arrow," she cried, "I am glad you thought out that idea; it is so different to anything you have done in the past and delightfully original."

He started back at the word which jarred upon him

strangely. He would like to have detached himself from Josephine's embrace, to be absolutely alone.

"The thought," he answered, "is one of inspiration, not invented for the sake of novelty, not striving after a new sensation. It is just truth, nothing more; only until this morning the truth somehow escaped me, and I saw with different eyes. It is possible to live entirely among phantoms, to create with our poor human brains the notable characters in history, thus missing the real men and women as they are, as they should be or as they were. Then possibly—all in a moment—some strong illuminating influence shatters your best dreams and puts them to shame by a revelation of reality."

Josephine listened with a smile, fancying she could fully comprehend the intricate working of her husband's mind.

"I understand," she said, but her voice sounded a little uncertain, despite her inward conviction.

Arrow, watching her now with lenient eyes, knew instinctively he was not really understood. His thoughts came from Mary's influence—and Josephine had not seen Mary yet.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MYSTERY OF MARY

MRS. PENREATH had intended sending for Miss Aquila to interview her formally, a task, self-imposed, to save Arrow all responsibility and trouble. But seeing the morning so inviting, she decided instead to go out and find the newcomer, conscious of an intense desire to see Mary at work in the garden. As Josephine walked through the sunny grounds she thought again of all she had heard about this woman, picturing the sleeping Samuel, the resigned Vines, the apparently infatuated Constance Eastlake expounding the fantastic theory that Mary among the lilies was so Madonna-like she might almost have been the Virgin Mother come to life.

"Of course I shall be disappointed," she told herself. "I have heard such accounts of Miss Aquila's beauty, I am bound to be disillusioned; one always expects too much."

The sight of Vines in the distance cutting flowers for the house made Josephine turn her steps in his direction. She had grown to think of him as rather a sullen, discontented man, with a harassed, jaded look. The servants told her he found his wife "a bit of a handful," and certainly the rumors of Mrs. Vines' extravagance were sufficient to make the young, hard-working husband an object of pity.

His "good-morning" was always respectful but de-

jected, spoken mournfully and accompanied by a downward glance. Now the handsome face turned to Mrs. Penreath with a bright smile and his "good-day, madam," rang with a note of cheerful salutation.

Josephine supposed that the warm spring weather was having its effect upon Vines' spirits. Certainly the garden, all growing, blowing and sunlit, was enough to warm the heart of any worker in the fruitful soil. It seemed as if suddenly spring stepped back, giving place to full triumphant summer.

"I am looking for Miss Aquila," said Josephine. "Can you tell me where she is?"

Vines glanced in the direction of the cottage which had once been Monk's.

"I think she has just stepped back to her home, ma'am, to give an eye to the child. She was up rare and early, and she's done more work, I may say, than any man I ever saw, yet she didn't seem tired, and I should think she was one as wouldn't complain whatever she had to do."

The confession surprised Josephine, who had scarcely expected to hear praise of the lady gardener from one who hoped to fill her place. This sudden change appeared almost unnatural and gave his listener an eerie sensation, filling her with a certain dread. Perhaps, after all, there was something uncanny about Mary, a charm that bewitched, a strength of example, a mysterious power of influence. Then why should such a wealth of virtue inspire Josephine with fear? This was the question she silently asked herself as she murmured:

"Oh! she has gone to see the little fellow she brought home last night? I heard there was quite a dramatic scene in the village and that you were passing at the time."

Vines nodded. "Yes, ma'am, never saw the like of it before, without a bit of fear or a by-your-leave, she took the lad in hand and paid no heed to his mother's curses. She came up to our place to get some clothes for him later on, and one of the twins suddenly woke up and cried out that she was an angel. Then, strangely enough, he fell asleep again in a moment, though he is such a restless child as a rule. Hettie couldn't make it out at all. If you will excuse my saying so, it might be wiser not to go up to the cottage just at present, for I met Mrs. Benn on her way there, tracking Miss Aquila. You might hear some language, though I will say the woman was not drunk this morning, or I would have turned her out of the grounds. She came up the drive, walking quite steadily, and certainly had full command of her senses, but as for rage, well, she was near bursting with anger when she named Miss Aquila's conduct. It seems, from what Mrs. Benn told me, that she had been talking over the affair with the police, and they have promised, if the boy is not restored to-day, to interfere and take him away by force."

Mrs. Penreath looked distinctly worried. She hated the idea of an unpleasant scene occurring at Rutherwyke.

"How very awkward," she said, speaking more to herself than to Vines. "I wonder if it is safe to let Mrs. Benn go alone to the cottage. She may do Mary some bodily harm."

Vines shook his head and smiled again.

"Don't you trouble about Miss Aquila's safety, ma'am. She has a way with her that might even disarm such a person as young Sam's mother, seeing as Mrs. Benn is sober now after her night's rest. From the look of her, I should say she had not seen the inside of the

Lion's Claw this morning. She has got sufficient sense to keep off the drink before going to the police station. I told her straight: 'If you can't be civil, best clear out. We won't have no swearing here or fisticuffs.' She was that afraid I wouldn't let her go on to the cottage, she grew quite humble and began wiping her eyes, telling me I was a parent and ought to understand her feelings. I thought perhaps, ma'am, it was better to let the two women have it out, for, after all, the boy was sort of stolen, and being the mother, I suppose she has a claim."

Mrs. Penreath agreed. Vines' undisguised interest in the situation afforded her secret amusement. She had no intention of taking his advice and keeping away from the cottage, so after pointing out some roses she wanted for her boudoir, she moved away in the direction of Mary's home. By now her curiosity was thoroughly aroused. She quickened her steps as she hastened down the Monk's Walk and passed the broad acre of herbaceous plants which led to the small white building in its sheltered nook.

As she approached the open door the sound of voices reached her. She drew nearer, intending to enter, but hesitated on the threshold, riveted by the sight which met her astonished eyes.

Mary stood, tall, erect, a strangely radiant figure, triumphant in the beauty that was solely of nature, and her glowing spirit, looking down with wistful yet compelling eyes at the short, red-faced woman in the crushed bonnet and untidy clothes, which told their own story of careless drunken habits.

Between them hovered the child with the "infant Samuel" face. To-day he was ruddy after his long night's rest, refreshed by a morning bath and the sweet, warm milk he had taken at breakfast. He wore a little white

suit, and his spotlessly clean appearance had evidently taken his mother by storm, for she gazed at him half stupidly, as if doubting her own senses.

"Blest if I knew'd 'im!" she muttered. "What 'ave you done to 'is 'air?"

One trembling finger, shooting through a torn black cotton glove, pointed to the fair halo, which loving hands had brushed until the rich gloss shone on each strand of live, bright gold. So clean was the little figure from head to foot that it seemed to his wondering mother he was some new creature, different to the dirty urchin she ill used in her fits of frenzy or sullen brooding. It staggered her to see that Sam could look as attractive as the children of the rich, to know that her son was beautiful, though she had never discovered his beauty until Mary showed her the amazing and almost terrifying change.

The woman who had snatched the boy from dirt and squalor to make him pure and utterly delightful, a specimen of childhood at its best, turned to answer Mrs. Benn's stammered question.

"Yes, is it not lovely hair? It does look different now it has been washed; you see it becomes many shades lighter and so fluffy. I am not surprised you hardly recognized him. There are lots of people who could be noble and happy if they were clean. But all the powers of love and joy somehow seem clogged by dirt, and you are apt to forget the jewel beneath. You never thought you could be proud of Sam, yet I am only his friend, and I feel tremendously proud of him to-day."

A genuine ring of admiration gave Mary's voice a tender maternal note. It stilled the curse on Mrs. Benn's lips and brought to her face a look of awe. The shifty eyes glanced first at the child and then at Mary.

Rage and mistrust gradually died away. Something of shame crept instead over the hard features coarsened by excess, softening them by the magic of example, as if a ray of light pierced a dungeon, speaking of a world where hearts could be happy, where the sun warmed and cheered, where men and women rejoiced in open skies and free, untainted air.

"I come to take 'im back," muttered the woman. "He's my boy. I come to tell yer"—she hesitated and quailed beneath the clear gaze of Mary's glowing eyes—"well, to tell yer things as p'raps had best be left unspoken. Maybe you meant no harm by the lad. Maybe I wouldn't 'ave minded any other time, but I always feel that upset on the day my man was took. Come that date—I just goes up to the Claw and tries to forget. But here, I don't want you preachin' at me; there are enough doing that, the chapel bloke and the parsin, and all them temperance lot. I never touched a drop before my trouble, but now, well, I'm a bit lonely, and I feels I want some comfort and cheer. Still, I'm fond of that lad, though I never tried to make a toff of 'im, and I just felt I could have killed you yesterday when you walked him off. Lucky I hadn't a weapon about me, and couldn't see straight neither, or there would 'ave been murder done. The day of my trouble, you see, lady, the day of my trouble come four years."

Mary drew a step nearer. Her attitude was one of sympathy rather than censure.

"Though you have lost your husband," she said gently, "he has left you a part of himself to guard and cherish. Human beings are all kings. Each has the kingdom of himself to govern, and he may, through influencing others, enlarge that kingdom to a vast empire. When I saw your child I thought at once that hi

surroundings were not fit for a young king, so I brought him here, and now instead of a tangled mass of unkempt hair, you see to full advantage the golden crown he was meant to wear. You must fit yourself to be his keeper and guide, then I will give him back to you. At present he will stay with me, and learn to be happy, and rule that great estate which is all his own."

Mrs. Benn looked mystified. Her thoughts could easily be read by the baffled expression in her eyes and the gaping wonder of a mouth that opened, but failed to speak. Mary's ideas were all so new to her, she could not grasp them for a moment. She put out her hands, as though to feel her way in the dark, then gripped the back of a chair and eyed Sam again.

"A king," she muttered, "that's funny! Who says he's a king?"

"I do," answered Mary, smiling.

Once more the mother viewed her child wonderingly.

"Might be from the looks of 'im. Lor'! but it's a queer idea, and you seem as if you meant it too."

The light from the window shone upon the face and form of the child in the white suit. He stood quite still, quite silent, knowing well he was the object of their conversation, dreading lest he would be torn from Mary's side and taken back to the dirt and misery of his home.

Mrs. Benn spoke again, this time a trifle boastfully, with a pathetic attempt to assert her will.

"He is mine for all that. I've a right in 'im you can't gainsay me for all your fine talk. I don't see why I should leave him here. Can't he be happy at home?"

Her voice was louder now, as her confidence grew, and she became more accustomed to her surroundings. She put out her hand to catch the boy's arm, but he darted aside and hid behind Miss Aquila's blue skirt.

Mary pointed to a chair.

"Sit down, Mrs. Benn," she said. "I want to discuss an idea with you. Of course you have a right to Sam. What a splendid thought—to have a right in a king! As you sit there, I think you can see yourself in the glass which hangs on the opposite wall. It is our only ornament on the plain white paper, and I placed it there to reflect the morning sunlight. At this moment it reflects you. Now, look well and tell me whether it does not seem just a little strange you should have created a thing of beauty and gladness? Remember, it was your own work, the marvelous, the blessed work of motherhood. You suffered and bore a human soul with its divinity, its immortality, its kingdom of brain and will. Is that nothing to be proud of? There are rich women to-day who would give half their fortune for a son like yours, yet the child of their dreams is held back; they are barren. They pray to God for issue, and He sees fit (we know not why) to turn a deaf ear and withhold the boon. But you are among the blessed—and not alone in your parental pride, for Sam's father is waiting to welcome the boy he left to fill his place in the world and in your heart. You have the task of training up your husband's legacy, if you would really be a mother worthy of the name and not dishonor your high calling. But, as you said just now, there are plenty of people to preach, and I am just going to trust you, that's all. I think it is right, if Sam stays with me, that you should see him every day, so listen to my suggestion. I mean to engage somebody from the village to come each morning and clean the cottage, and I should like you to undertake the work. I will give you a complete set of new clothes, and you must always wear them when you come here. You must bring clean hands, a clean face and a bright smile.

You must promise me, of course, to give up drinking, because I could not allow a drunkard to associate with Sam."

Mary spoke so naturally and calmly that at first it seemed as if she had said nothing very extraordinary. Mrs. Benn, listening to the words with attentive ears, grew suddenly pale from emotion, then sprang with a cry to her feet, her lips quivering, her dull eyes brightened by tears of joy, her hands clasped as if in supplication. She tottered to Mary's side.

"You—you—would trust me? You think I could give up the drink and come here, to your cottage to keep it clean? You believe that? If you're mockin' me, it's time you stopped. I'm a woman I tell you with feelings, for all they may gibe at me in Abbotts Brooke. I'm down because I fretted. I lost heart, but I could do better for the boy's sake—and maybe for yours."

Sam was nestling in the circle of Mary's arm, and the two regarded Mrs. Benn with pitying eyes.

"Of course I mean what I say," answered Miss Aquila warmly. "So soon as you can get the clothes and become clean, like Sam, I shall expect you to arrive and look after the place. You had better not let Mr. or Mrs. Penreath see you to-day; they might disapprove of my choice. When they hear you are at the cottage later on, your changed appearance will be its own recommendation."

Josephine drew back behind the door. She felt sure Mary observed her, and fancied the words were spoken out of consideration for Sam's mother, as a hint to the listener to conceal her presence.

"Oh! you are good—you are good," cried Mrs. Benn almost fiercely. "You know 'ow to 'elp. You're not one of the mealy-mouthed lot, what jaws and does

nothing. Strike me blind if I fail you! I'd sooner cut off my right hand than go to the Claw when in your service. I shall see you often if I come, shan't I, miss? And you'll just speak a word now and again when you pop in from the garden. It gives one fresh heart to be trusted once more; it sort o' draws a body together; it's 'eaven right 'ere. I didn't think to meet an angel when I came up to Rutherwyke this morning."

"Nor a king," added Mary with a musical little laugh. "Sam is coming to the kitchen garden with me now, so as you have plenty to do, we won't waste any more time talking. Take this money for your clothes and lay it out to the best possible advantage. You might walk into Egham this afternoon and look at the shops; no time like the present. Be sure you get everything new. A new life is best started in fresh, unspoiled attire, but first clean out the little home, Mrs. Benn. You must not soil the spotless wardrobe in dirty cupboards."

Mrs. Benn's face looked radiant as her eyes rested lovingly on the coins from Mary's purse.

"If temptations come," continued the soft voice, "say to yourself: 'I'm a mother, and Mary told me a mother was the grandest thing on God's earth.' Remember the kingdom you have given Sam, the kingdom we must teach him to rule. Pride in your child, and then pride in yourself, will beat down the craving for drink. If it's a battle, if it strikes hard, if it hurts, then be glad. Self-trust is the very essence of heroism, and you have to trust yourself, even as I trust you, completely, without a thought of failure. The fight with unseen forces, the splendid victory will make you free; it will raise and cleanse. Come, Sam, bid your mother good-bye and say: 'God bless you.' "

Sam smiled broadly at the thought of framing the unexpected words. Then he looked up with a little chuckle of delight and lisped: "God bless you" in a shrill treble.

Mrs. Benn did not attempt to kiss him as she turned to go. She was afraid of his spotless appearance, for now she felt thoroughly conscious of her own dilapidated condition. She realized her hands were unwashed, her coat torn and her skirt caked still with the winter's mud. She made a feeble effort to straighten her crooked bonnet in the glass Mary had indicated a few moments since, but for lack of pins it stubbornly declined to remain in a dignified position.

"Never mind," murmured Mary kindly, "the new bonnet will be so much firmer."

Mrs. Benn hurried to the door with a whispered "thank you," and saw Josephine standing back to let her pass. Just for a moment she hesitated, as if expecting some harsh word or angry question, but the mistress of Rutherwyke was silent. Then, with set lips and panting breath the short black figure made a sudden dart for the path, and with quick running steps vanished behind the holly hedge, thankful to be protected from spying eyes, vaguely wondering if Mrs. Penreath would reproach Mary for receiving such a visitor.

"Poor woman, I am afraid I terrified her," said the artist's wife as she turned to Mary with a deprecating gesture. "I waited outside because I did not like to break in upon an interview which Vines warned me might be somewhat stormy. It was quite wonderful to hear you taming Mrs. Benn, but I feel sure the money you gave her so generously will be spent in drink, and you will never see her arrive in those new clothes to

look after the cottage. Besides, how could such a person keep any place clean?"

Josephine spoke hopelessly, but Mary smiled away the doubt.

"That remains to be seen. It was the least I could do under the circumstances. She was so forlorn, I had to give her a chance. Don't you think those people are often put purposely in our path, that we may help them? I felt terribly sorry for her when she spoke of her husband's death and the shocking way she keeps the anniversary. It was such a poor, pitiful excuse. But one must be kind to widows; they are indeed desolate. I came across another very sad case yesterday—also a widow, and she was following her only son to the grave."

As Josephine listened to the sympathetic voice an uneasy suspicion possessed her that the speaker viewed life from a higher plane, reached unconsciously through purity of spirit and forgetfulness of self. Mary's mind dwelt in a kindlier altitude, inhabiting a world where duty became pleasure, where all souls counted and none were worthless or despised. Mrs. Penreath wondered how she gained this clear, unfettered view, this deep sympathy and understanding. Possibly Vines had already caught the infection of Mary's smile, and the newcomer was responsible for his bright, changed manner.

"I suppose," said Mrs. Penreath, allowing the child to play with the tasseled ends of her scarf, "that you have trained yourself to try and think well of everybody. It must be difficult, since there are so many vicious, dishonest people to be met everywhere. As to trusting Mrs. Benn——"

Josephine broke off with a little toss of her head and a look which clearly showed she quite despaired of

Sam's mother, fearing the ill-advised confidence placed in her by Mary.

The lady gardener was quick to catch the satirical tone, noting the critical half-curious gaze turned in her direction.

"I think," replied the voice which Arrow likened to the Gabriel bell, "I believe in people because I have lived so long in the world, and from many years of experience find it is worth while. This is a secret learned by age, after many wanderings and not a little pain."

The low retort held a wealth of meaning. Mary seemed speaking more to herself than to Mrs. Penreath. The artist's wife looked at the youthful figure, in the full bloom of early womanhood, with astonishment, marveling at the words.

"But you are quite young," she declared emphatically. "Compared to me you're a mere child. Why, to hear you talk, you might be double my age."

The sun was shining on Mary's face, proving it without line or wrinkle—enveloping the form, feminine yet strong, and making the blue of her gown like the azure skies or the rich tone of a summer sea.

"Women never care to give away their ages," she answered with a little laugh, which charmed Josephine and made her forget they were newly acquainted. "Perhaps I am far older than you think, and in time you will find me out."

As Mary spoke Mrs. Penreath realized that the newcomer was certainly very mysterious. She stood with the sun's rays reflected upon her upright figure, its womanly curves diffusing warmth and light, as if she herself were the very center of those dancing beams.

Sam was growing impatient. He began to pull at Mary's skirt and look toward the garden. Josephine

forgot that as yet Miss Aquila had made no excuse for the boy's presence.

"I'll walk with you to the kitchen garden," said Mrs. Penreath, "and Sam shall see my baby chickens."

The three passed out together from the White Cottage to the sunlit path. For a moment there was silence. Josephine's thoughts were busy with a proposition she promised to make for Arrow. He was keenly desirous that Mary should be the model for his new picture and suggested that his wife might try and arrange the matter for him as diplomatically as possible. Surely, he argued, his fame was more important than the progress and care of any garden. Much as he loved Rutherwyke, the grounds could go to rack and ruin if their prosperity were to rob him of a desired object to feed his inspiration. From earliest years art came first—wife, home, love, self, all ranked beneath the insatiable calls of that great career which ruled him as a god. He would suffer willingly to achieve, he would make others suffer in the cause, if by their sacrifice the work excelled.

"Of course," Josephine began, looking down at Sam to avoid meeting Mary's eyes, "I can see you are very fond of gardening, or you would never have succeeded so well; besides, Lady Constance told me your presence at the school was invaluable; she really does not know what they will do without you. Still, however well we succeed in one sphere, it is occasionally pleasant to have a little change and turn to something else, if only for a short time."

Mrs. Penreath walked slowly, as though to detain Mary, who, out of politeness, suited her steps to the languid saunter, though her mind was far away, in scenes of active labor and plans for Rutherwyke.

"Oh! yes, change is very refreshing, but I prefer

change of situation to change of work," replied Mary quickly. "I never stay long in one place. I just come for a little, and I do my best to prepare the way for those who follow. Strangely enough, I often arrive where there has been trouble. Lady Constance was on the verge of giving up her gardening efforts when first I went to the Eastlake School. The girls were doing badly, there seemed no order in the place and the soil was not productive. Somehow I was fortunate in putting fresh courage into Lady Constance, who was just beginning to despair. The students only wanted a little understanding, and by degrees (it was like playing a game) the fortunes of the gardening school turned a corner and started off on the right road. Before I came here I heard of your trouble with Monk. It is terrible to have to suspect an old servant and throw him out of work, leaving him on the world with a lost character and perhaps a broken heart."

Josephine disliked any mention of this subject, which was peculiarly disagreeable to her. But Mary spoke so naturally, her listener could not take offense, soothed by the warm yet saintly glow in the face of this beautiful woman, which appeared to give her the privilege of saying and doing just what she pleased without offense. The artist's wife felt little surprise that Arrow should desire Mary for the model of the Virgin. To find a fitting type for such a picture one must surely seek a soul shining through the outwardly fair form, a personality revealing some lineament of heaven and spark of life divine.

"My husband particularly dislikes changes," said Josephine, a trifle uneasily, somewhat nettled by Mary's candid announcement. "I hope if we mutually suit each other that you will not be wanting to leave us simply

for the sake of changing. I was alluding to some slight variety in professional duties. I have been especially requested to ask if you would spare the time for a few sittings in the studio."

Mary did not appear the least surprised at the suggestion, though she promptly shook her head—rather she seemed to have expected some such request.

"I am a gardener," she answered simply—and in Josephine's mind the name took a new form of romance as Mary framed the word—"not an artist's model."

Mrs. Penreath coughed slightly, a habit of hers when perturbed. Then she drew the light scarf firmly over her shoulders, as if to ward off a sense of chill.

"I know the request is unusual. But may I not tell my husband at least you will think it over? Perhaps you might possibly change your mind after a little consideration. You see, he is very highly strung and cannot understand his wishes being thwarted. It would make it far easier for me if the refusal might come from you direct."

Mary turned to the speaker spontaneously, and Josephine had never felt herself so quickly and entirely understood.

"Of course. Tell him to ask me himself, that will be much better."

"Thank you," said Josephine.

They walked on in silence, no longer feeling like strangers, for a bond of sympathy sprang up between them, bringing the woman of fashion and the humble worker into tune with each other.

Though Josephine said little, she was unusually sensitive to Mary's strange individual spirit, aware that the texture of the soul and body at her side was in some way different to the million souls and bodies she had

met in her earth journey. Possibly other people were less restful, less quick to comprehend. In a mysterious way Mary's presence illuminated her most ordinary remarks, her every gesture, her very step; the regal grace of her absolutely simple dress formed a living enchantment, free entirely from the wiles of the world.

The woman at her side felt enriched by proximity. When at last—because Mary had work to do—the butterfly felt obliged to flutter away, it was with unwilling wings and unspoken regrets.

Quickly Josephine retraced her steps to the studio, where she found Arrow arranging passion flowers with the quick, impatient touch of one who knows exactly what he wants and brooks no delay.

"Will Mary sit for me?" he asked, without looking up, for his sharp ears recognized Josephine's step.

Mrs. Penreath stood by the models' platform with an expression in her eyes which might well have puzzled Arrow as she replied: "You had better ask her yourself. Mary is a little difficult at present. Only her first day here and already you want her to leave the garden. Perhaps she thought, with me, that it was hardly fair. Still I have no doubt it is easier for a man to persuade a woman than one of her own sex."

Arrow seldom valued what he obtained too easily, and Josephine's words failed to crush his hope or disturb his plans.

"Never mind," he said. "I'll see her about it later on. What did you think of Mary?"

Mrs. Penreath drew nearer. One small ringed hand touched Arrow's arm lightly. Then she answered in a hushed voice:

"I don't know what to think, but she certainly had a weird psychological effect upon me. At first I felt

warm, and the warmth and the light seemed to come from her; then, while we walked in the full glare of the sun, my flesh began to creep—as if"—she paused and laughed defiantly at the absurd idea—"as if indeed I were keeping step with some one who was not real."

Arrow looked up now and saw for the first time the wonder in Josephine's face.

"I fancied," she continued, still speaking in a whisper, "the newcomer was in some way different to myself, so spiritual perhaps, that she gives one the sensation of being in touch with the unseen. It is all so unusual and unexpected, for though Constance tried to prepare me, I never thought she could be like that. When I left Mary I hardly knew whether to laugh or cry—in fact, I am quite hysterical now. Shall we tell her to go? Shall we ask her to stay always—always and never leave us? Oh! Arrow, you are clever, perhaps you can explain? I'm in a mist—I'm frightened and yet glad. I can't understand my own feelings; I am like a child frightened in the dark."

Arrow put his arms round Josephine, feeling her shoulders tremble.

"If I were the ordinary man, I should say you were a little out of sorts and very imaginative."

His wife nestled closer.

"But you are not the ordinary man, Arrow."

Her words conveyed a truth he knew only too well.

"No, and therefore I agree with you that Mary has some power which is unusual and mystifying, though I am certainly unable to explain it away. We must wait, watch and keep our own counsel. Time will make everything clear, and Miss Aquila cannot really be so very different to other people. Nothing remains a mystery

very long—not death itself. In a good hour we learn even that great secret—last of all."

Josephine sighed.

"But I hope," she murmured, "I shall not have to wait until I am dead before I fathom the mystery of Mary."

CHAPTER IX

MARY'S LONG BLUE CLOAK

THE long summer morning and the drowsy afternoon which bathed Rutherwyke's grounds in sunlight saw nothing more of the busy artist imprisoned in his studio.

Arrow spent the rest of the day making prospective sketches and painting passion flowers. His picture had not as yet taken a definite form in his mind. He thought, too, that, after all, perhaps it was a little soon to ask favors of Mary. Her first day in the new garden naturally occupied her mind and was full of interest.

An artist's studio would make a strange contrast to the work she loved outside and might naturally repel one apparently unconscious of her physical beauty. So he wisely kept away, aware that many a desire in life met early doom through too great a display of anxiety.

It was not until the sun set that Mary left the garden and made her way once again to Abbotts Brooke. All through the day her thoughts turned constantly to the woman who had slept beneath her cloak, with tears still wet upon her cheek and the light from a street lamp gleaming across a darkened room. This evening as the shadows gathered she would once again see Mrs. Cray and judge if that sleep proved sufficiently sure to build up the tired frame and make the weary eyes look out upon a happier world. Perhaps some word spoken in

the twilight might bind together the broken strings of a woman's sorrowing heart, drawing them into tune—making life harmonious. Such thoughts passed hopefully through Mary's mind as she walked down the hill by Rutherwyke Lane, which now seemed quite familiar. Vines was also on his way back to high tea and Hettie. Seeing him following at a respectful distance, Mary waited, with a pleasant smile, to give him some instructions for to-morrow's work. He listened with attention and no little surprise as her words unfolded admirable knowledge of the gardener's art. He had never believed it possible he could learn gardening from a woman, but Mary was planting seeds of knowledge which sank deeply into his mind.

"I must say, miss," he declared at last, longing to confide in her, "it seems as if everything ought to go smoothly with the likes of you about a place, yet I can't help still thinking of Monk and his sad fate. Somehow to-day I have dwelt on him more than ever. Once or twice I could have sworn I heard his footfall behind me on the path. He had a peculiarly heavy way of tramping along the gravel. I turned sharply and looked for him several times, absolutely sure he was coming with some message or plea for help. It brought me out all of a cold sweat when I saw there wasn't a soul in sight, for I'm not given to imagining things. How can one account for them footsteps I'd like to know?"

Mary listened without surprise. Her air of understanding was peculiarly conducive to confidence as she replied:

"A fanciful brain often plays tricks, and our thoughts may mislead us, especially when we are tired or worried. You worked so long under Monk it would not seem right to forget him immediately. His dismis-

sal, too, with its revelation of deceit and shame, came as such a shock that it naturally lingers in your mind, taking a more persistent hold upon the imagination than if you had parted under happier circumstances. I suppose he really deserved to be turned away; Mr. Penreath could hardly have misjudged him. The poor man reaped the harvest of his own misdeeds and would not blame his master for acting as he did. But if, by any terrible mistake, Monk was innocent and falsely accused of dishonesty, he is indeed a martyr, then the very angels might weep, then——"

Here she paused, drawing herself up sharply, as though the words were running away with her and she feared what she might say.

Vines' hands were clenched. He had become strangely pale. In a tremulous voice he ventured to add: "And then, Miss Aquila? Won't you finish your sentence?"

"Well, I was going to add, perhaps his feet might haunt the garden, if such things were possible. But probably the heavy tread re-echoed from your brain; it was just a passing fancy, I expect."

Despite her reassuring tone, the man looked troubled still.

They were nearing Abbotts Brooke, and now Vines hesitated, glancing first toward his home, then up the empty road.

Mary waited for him to speak again. She could see he had something on his mind.

"I don't object to telling you," he said, "that when my missus mentioned last night how Monk was talking of doing away with himself, it seemed to catch me at the windpipe. It just took my breath clean away and nigh throttled me. If my old pal was to do anything

foolish—well, I would not answer for the consequences to myself. I think I'd go raving mad."

He shuffled his feet, casting his eyes nervously upon the ground to conceal their terrified expression. Mary saw a red streak of color creep from his ear to his forehead and spread its dye by slow stages across the whole face.

"If you can find out where Monk is staying," she said softly, and her voice rang out like a note of music, "send him to me. I might find him a situation. I have a friend who believes in my theory of trusting people when they are down. In this way one can often lift them up and redeem them from the misery of the past. This friend would give Monk work were I to ask him, and I feel sure he would never regret lending a helping hand in this particular case."

A look of intense relief broke over Vines' features as he answered eagerly:

"Oh! in Monk's name—and in that of his wife and family—I thank you from the bottom of my heart. You will be doing a real charity—saving a life, perhaps, snatching a man from a suicide's grave. It won't be difficult to get hold of him, for Hettie says he is in these parts. I will make it my business to find out his address immediately, for I don't feel easy about him at all. If, Miss Aquila, there is anything I can do for you in return, no matter how hard, just speak the word and I'll be your servant—your slave, if you will—gladly for the goodness you are showing my poor old friend and the weight you are lifting off my mind."

Mary smiled at this sudden flow of language and unexpected gallantry. She wanted no thanks and told Vines so as she turned toward the main street, where

Mrs. Cray lived, dismissing him with a pleasant "good-night."

He hurried back to the wife, who only the previous evening feigned jealousy of Mary, conscious he had done something very unusual in offering to be her slave and really hoping for a chance of proving the well-meant words.

"A bit of luck Hettie wasn't by with her long ears to catch that last remark of mine," Vines told himself. "Might have been misunderstood! But there, Miss Aquila's a good sort, and I don't care if it did sound like high falutin'; it was genuine enough, bless 'er kind face! If she calls on me to fulfil that promise, come twenty years, I'll not fail her."

For the moment Vines was a hero in his own thoughts, doing some great deed of sacrifice for the sake of the woman who had offered to help Monk in his hour of need.

"Anything," muttered Vines—"anything to lay them footsteps a-trampin' after me all day in the grounds of Rutherwyke. It's enough to drive a fellow silly—and then the dreams at night!"

He wiped his forehead with the back of his hand, which grew moist at some fearful remembrance. He hoped his wife would not observe the terror lurking in his eyes as he entered the cottage silently. Hettie received him with a saucy expression, mock anger lurking in the tilt of her chin and the sharp elbows set akimbo.

"I saw you!" she said laughingly. "I saw you saying your farewells to the lady gardener! Taken to walking out together, have you? Well, this time I'm not jealous. Since she called here about those clothes, I knew she was not the sort to care two straws for the likes of you, and that makes me easy in my mind. But, by the

way, Matthew, I had a rare score off Mrs. Monk to-day. Would you believe—she was actually audacious enough to show her ugly mug in Abbotts Brooke, though she knows quite well all the scandal came out? Every one here looks on her now as the wife of a common thief, and she must be thick-skinned to be seen in the place. But there she was, large as life, and had the impertinence to wish me 'good-day,' quite friendly like."

"What's the harm in that!" muttered Vines, but Hettie paid no heed to the ejaculation, so eager was she to detail her recent encounter. Never before had her voice sounded so peculiarly strident to Matthew's ear as she reeled out the cruel words:

"I'm not sure Mrs. Monk didn't expect me to stop for the usual gossip. Lor'! but I took the shine out of her! I just caught the boys by the hand and pulled them away, for fear they should touch her skirts, and I looked right up at the sky with a blank stare—so. She gasped for a moment as if she did not understand and then she went quite white, turned tail and fled, while I thanked my lucky stars I wasn't married to a man like Monk. I bet she aided him to swindle the master. I always thought she had a shifty look."

Hettie spoke so quickly that it took Matthew some moments to fully comprehend the statement. Then his face changed to a dull purple and the veins on his forehead swelled visibly, while he raised one threatening hand as though to strike her in sudden, uncontrollable anger.

"You did that!" he thundered. "You gave Mrs. Monk the go by, now that she is down on her luck? She, as we've always respected and treated as a friend, she as was never too proud to know you when her husband was over me. Good Lord—you did that?"

Mrs. Vines shrank back as Matthew's uplifted hand fell quivering to his side. Never before had she seen in his eyes such a keen look of anger and scorn, an expression almost murderous in its fierce hate.

"You wouldn't wish me to know a thief's wife," Hettie whispered, half afraid of her own voice in the presence of such righteous indignation. "Why, it isn't fit or proper for me and the children to be seen consorting with her. I don't know what has come over you to expect anything of the kind."

A sound like the growl of an injured beast escaped Vines' lips. His muttered retort cut deep and Hettie flinched as she listened to the disdainful words:

"I don't expect my wife to be a lady; she ain't built that way, I know. But there is a difference between being simple working folk and downright cads. If I had come by, I would have forced you to apologize on the spot, as it is I can only writhe with shame for you, Hettie, and try to forget how you've lowered us this day."

Mrs. Vines shrugged her shoulders, tossing her head haughtily. She had heard enough for the present and was prepared to retaliate, having recovered from the first shock of surprise.

"Oh! very well, writhe away," she retorted sharply. "Since Monk disgraced himself it seems to me you have got a bee in your bonnet. I will take good care not to be telling you my news so free another evening."

Vines looked too thoroughly disgusted to pursue the conversation, but as he sat down gloomily he pictured the gray-haired Mrs. Monk, convinced of her husband's innocence, watching Hettie as she sailed by with her children, uttering no word, giving no look in return for the older woman's kindly salutation. He found the four

walls of the parlor cramping and distasteful with such visions for company and wondered what Mary could be doing in Abbotts Brooke, wishing he might walk back with her to Rutherwyke. At least he could stand by the door and watch for her to pass. Perhaps he would find some excuse to return to the garden. Anything to escape from the cramping influence of home and to see again the sweet smiling face of the woman who was going to help Monk.

Meanwhile Mary's blue-gowned figure had reached Mrs. Cray's solitary abode. As she approached the sound of voices fell upon her ears. A number of women were talking loudly, while others conversed in excited undertones. The front door stood open as if to invite entrance, and within a curious group had gathered round a table, on which lay Mary's long blue cloak. The assembled people stood close together, bending over the garment. One touched it with hesitating fingers, another stared at it through her spectacles as if it were some rare curiosity, another, unseen by Mrs. Cray, was bending down to cut a small piece of the material from the deep blue hem.

The widow's cheeks no longer appeared pale, the flush of temporary excitement made her face look almost healthy.

"Oh! yes," she was saying, "I am a different woman to-day, and it wasn't nothing of earth that did it, I know that well enough. The one as come to me worked a miracle and left the cloak as a sign. I tell you she passed in right through the wall, though she asked me to unbolt the door first, just by way of not skeering me, I suppose. I could see at once she wasn't human, and of course I knew, too, by the way she talked; such wonderful things she said to be sure—well, it made all the

world seem different! She put me down on the sofa when my mind was quieted a bit and laid that magic garment over me, and I slept like a baby till the morning. If it hadn't been for the cloak, I should have said it was a dream. But, look here, dreams don't give you good material like that. It was a visitant of sorts from goodness knows where, and I'll never see her again, leastways not on this earth. But when folks scoff at ghosts and appearances coming after bereavements, or when the dead are in the house, I shall tell them straight some can walk and talk who are not real to my certain knowledge."

The woman who had spoken to Mary when the funeral passed eyed the company of startled neighbors incredulously, then turned again to the cloak spread out before their wondering gaze.

"It looks," she said, "uncommonly as if it matched the blue dress that lady was wearing who ran away with young Sam yesterday. I noticed her particularly, for she stopped and had a word with me just before you drove by, Mrs. Cray. She was asking about your son. I told her how kind Mr. James had been and I also named your bit of a tiff with Mrs. Pertree. Several of the neighbors wondered who the stranger could be and remarked on her looks. She was very pretty—in fact, a real beauty such as I never saw before in Abbotts Brooke. She went up toward Pilgrim Way with Mrs. Benn's boy and young Mr. Vines from Rutherwyke. So I am of opinion she just dropped in last night to try and cheer you up. Magic and such like is for children at Christmas time and can't be taken seriously by grown-up folks in their full senses!"

The words were spoken in fine scorn. Seeing no one felt inclined to reply, the material voice continued its

hard truths with renewed courage and marked disapproval:

"Strikes me, Mrs. Jones, ghost or no ghost, it's hardly right that you should be snipping away with them scissors at the back of the table. We've come here to get at the truth of Mrs. Cray's story, which is all over the village by now, and not to destroy what don't belong to us, begging your pardon for my plain speaking."

With a cry Mrs. Cray snatched the cloak to her breast, tears rushing to her eyes as she gazed at the damage done so quietly by the little old woman.

"Oh!" she gasped, "what can I say now if the lady should come again? How could you take such a liberty as to cut up other folks' property? It's too bad! That is what comes of making free with one's confidence and telling outsiders what they don't deserve to know."

The widow's voice shook with mingled horror and anger as she turned widely opened eyes of reproof on Mrs. Jones.

The culprit quickly slipped her small folding scissors into a pocket in her apron, while she concealed the square piece of blue material in the bodice of her shabby black dress.

"Very sorry," she murmured humbly, "very sorry indeed for giving offense. But you ain't the only one to lie awake. For the last month or two I have suffered wonderful at nights, and as to sleeping—well, I don't know what it is to close my eyes. I thought I'd put a bit of the cloak under my pillow to try if there was magic in it, but since you think the lady is coming back —well, she can't be more than ordinary flesh and blood. You said you would never be seeing her again, and I believed you—that's all."

Before Mrs. Cray could reply, Mary pushed the door

widely open and stood facing the small group of women in her calm beauty. At first her entrance caused a flurried movement of startled surprise, then instinctively a hush fell, so intense that a pin could have been heard to fall. All eyes were eagerly turned upon her radiant face, which, by its very brightness, seemed to set in motion waves of healing.

"It doesn't matter at all," said Mary softly. "The little hole in my cloak will make it so much more valuable to me. I should love Mrs. Jones to sleep upon the piece, which I would have willingly given her. Perhaps it will bring some good dreams and make her feel happier, for I really fancy my cloak has a soothing influence. I am not surprised that I seemed rather a ghostly visitant to Mrs. Cray, since we sat together last night in the dark, and the street lamp only just helped us to see each other's faces. I told her she must try and rest. I forced the idea upon her mind to the best of my ability. I also warned her she would find on the morrow much work to do for her large family, the world. I wanted to make her feel she was not alone, that many kind people in the village were sending her loving thoughts of sympathy in her sorrow. Now I come back to discover the door open instead of barred and friends gathered round in the home which seemed so empty and silent yesterday. Oh! it was good to hear voices. If my cloak could speak, it would be very proud this evening."

The women listened wonderingly to the words, their eyes scanning the stranger with open scrutiny and hungry interest. Of all that gossiping throng, drawn to the house by curiosity, Mrs. Jones alone believed a supernatural visitor had spread an enchanted wrap

over Mrs. Cray which wafted her to realms of slumber, where pain and bereavement could be forgotten.

But now, as the women looked at Mary and saw the mysterious charm of her whole being and the light of her almost unearthly smile, they were strangely awed. For a moment even Mrs. Cray appeared afraid to speak, as the vision of the previous night and that long, peaceful sleep returned to mystify her brain. Then suddenly taking courage, she stretched out her hand toward the newcomer and asked the question which had been left unanswered in the dim room when they were alone together, asked it as a right, her tremulous voice taking a tone of command:

"Who are you? Tell me that. Why do you trouble about me? What has brought you to Abbotts Brooke?"

In the pause which followed the women exchanged excited glances, looking from Mrs. Cray to the stranger and touching each other surreptitiously with hands that eagerly desired mutual human contact.

The answer came so naturally that it banished their unspoken dread:

"My name is Mary Aquila. I am a gardener at Rutherwyke."

As the spell broke they breathed more freely, only Mrs. Cray kept her eyes riveted upon the blue-gowned figure with a new light dawning in their tired depths, a light of comprehension which the others failed to understand.

"Mary," she murmured in a low, hesitating whisper —"Mary." Surely there was a world of meaning in her hushed and reverent tone!

"Quite a homely name," said the low, melodious voice.

Mrs. Cray clasped her hands and her breast heaved.

"A Bible name," she said softly in accents of adora-

tion. "Mary sat at the Lord's feet, and I think from your face you have sat there too."

Her friends wondered at the words, but made no comment, only they noticed a shadow passing by the window, the shadow of Mrs. Benn making her way up the village street toward the Lion's Claw.

Mary said nothing, but she, too, watched the shadow, while the little group turned again to her, waiting for a word. Once more a thrill of delicious dread swept over them, the dread of children when they creep to the borderland of some fairy town peopled by specters and winged forms.

At last Mary spoke:

"I have not come to take the cloak away, for I think perhaps it will help Mrs. Cray to sleep again. She must try and endow it herself with mystical power and forget it only belonged to a humble garden worker."

The stranger spoke as if she were their equal, yet the simple words failed to induce the women to accept her as such. The gentle intonation of her voice, her refinement of form and feature, the noble, unadorned grace of clothes so utterly different to any they had seen before, all impressed their unsophisticated minds with wondering veneration. Each face looked brighter for her coming, but Mary refused the pressing offer "to please walk in and sit down." She remained standing where the doorway framed her like a picture.

"Not to-night," she said pleasantly. "I have work to do and it is getting late. Besides, Mrs. Cray has plenty of friends now."

Once more her eyes traveled to the window, but Mrs. Benn was no longer to be seen.

Although the women wanted her to stay, they instinctively breathed more freely as she turned to go. A

chorus of voices murmured, "Good-night, miss," in rather timid tones. Mrs. Jones opened her lips to join in the general farewell, but no sound came, and closing them again in silence, she clutched convulsively at her breast, where the tiny scrap of blue material lay concealed.

Mary moved away so softly that her footfall made no sound upon the step as she vanished into the village street.

"I know why she left the cloak behind," said the neighbor from King's Bench Cottages.

Mrs. Cray held the garment to her heart, and her bright smile puzzled the little assembly almost as much as Mary's had done in the dignity and grandeur of her calm beauty.

"So do I," murmured the widow.

Mrs. Jones turned eagerly to the first speaker, anticipating her words.

"It was because," she gasped, "the lady knew it could heal and help, and she did not begrudge me my bit of the charm."

Triumph rang in this assertion from one who seldom spoke with authority, for the frail body already felt strengthened, as the power of conviction refreshed its weary fiber.

"Not a bit of it," replied the woman of sense, her feet planted upon the sure ground of common reason as she looked disdainfully at Mrs. Jones' glistening eyes, in which tears of joy were gathering. "Don't run away with any such idea. Of course Miss Aquila wasn't going to take the thing back once you had spoiled it, cutting out bits like them American travelers who knock pieces off monuments and make havoc of the good old graves at Abbotts Brooke. Why, you had only to look at Miss

Aquila to see she was not likely to wear rags. The cloak was no use to her, so she wouldn't bother to carry it home."

They gathered round the window to watch Mary's graceful figure drifting away in the distance. It was nearing the Lion's Claw, and soon the blue of her gown would brighten in the garish light from those plate-glass windows. She would pass beneath the hanging sign of a forest monster, holding in its claws the lifeless body of a young roe; she would be close to Sam's mother —possibly they would meet face to face.

"The great red building must seem to Miss Aquila like a den of lions waiting hungrily for prey, sought from the devil and not from God," said the widow with a sigh. "I guess she'll cross over the road to avoid Mrs. Benn."

But Mrs. Jones shook her head, adding confidently: "She doesn't look the one to pass by on the other side, and she told us she had work to do."

CHAPTER X

THE VOICE OF AN OLD FRIEND

MRS. BENN spent the afternoon shopping in Egham with a sense of pride and self-respect which recalled the happy days before her widowhood. She was determined, if possible, to purchase the necessary clothing with such a brave show of economy that she might boast a little money in hand when appearing the following morning at Mary's cottage.

Seldom had Mrs. Benn walked with a lighter step. Her face veritably glowed with happiness at the inspiring idea of endeavor. She tried to think that Miss Aquila, the woman who stole Sam, the woman with the sure belief in his mother's reform, moved invisibly at her side with words of encouragement. The afternoon quest for a suitable wardrobe seemed blessed by singular good fortune. Had Mrs. Benn believed in the rise of a lucky star, she could not have doubted that some fortunate planet shone high in the heavens, guiding her course.

Bargains were waiting ready for her to procure, shop assistants apparently knew her requirements almost before she spoke, while the fine weather made window-gazing enticing.

As she returned from her successful pilgrimage the village brought back sharply to her mind the memory of recent degradation. How familiar to wend her way toward the well-known Claw, to shelter within its fa-

miliar walls and enjoy the refreshment which brought her to moral and financial ruin! In future, she knew, she must put the old life behind, not for a moment letting her eyes wander to the brightly painted door—never again allowing her feet to cross the threshold, though the desire be great and the craving strong.

"It's good-bye to the Claw," she murmured beneath her breath. "Kings' mothers must keep themselves to themselves. Kings' mothers!"

She laughed shortly. The whimsical idea appeared in such a thoroughly humorous light that the laugh ended in a chuckle of genuine amusement as Mrs. Benn paused to press both hands to her sides with an expressive "Oh, Lor'!"

It was early to go back to the lonely, comfortless home, so she walked on leisurely, continuing the same line of thought:

"A nice young lady that Miss Aquila, but talks a lot of nonsense in her spare time. I wonder where she gets such notions from. Me a king's mother, me, buying second-hand clothes from old Mrs. Jugg, me, with my toes out of my boots. Well, to-morrow the king's mother has a print dress to step into as spick and span as any slavey's, and she is going to clean out the young king's house on her knees and do the charing just as well as ever she can. To-morrow!"

Here Mrs. Benn paused, for conscience whispered it would have been wiser to turn in at her gate, instead of proceeding up the street, toward temptation and the old disastrous haunt.

"Maybe," she said, lingering outside the public house and feeling the few spare coins in her pocket, "that the lady meant I wasn't to go to the Claw after to-day. I can't remember as she mentioned specially about this

evening. I shan't be wearin' the new clothes till to-morrow, and she said 'twas best to start a new life in new things. To begin now, in these old togs, wouldn't be best if her words were true."

This philosophy appeared so pleasing that Mrs. Benn smiled again, with an alluring sense of belief in her own self-deception. Already she was near the swinging glass door, from which, in the early evening, a peculiarly bright lamp sent forth inviting rays across the narrow village path. Her steps at first had been slow and hesitating, but quickened perceptibly as she remembered the money saved through careful expenditure during the afternoon. She no longer wished to feel Mary's presence at her side, but banished the thought nervously, shaking it off with a rebellious effort. To-morrow she would do all the bidding of the lady in blue, but to-night old clothes still hung upon Mrs. Benn's emaciated frame, while the old habits called with fierce persistency and alluring love notes. It was the unholy passion of a soiled life wooing her as she hastened forward in soiled garments. She felt drawn, compelled, ruled. The blood coursed through her veins hotly, and the money, now grasped in her burning palm, seemed like a living touch. She walked hand in hand with an enemy whom she hailed as friend.

"Just to-night for the last time," she murmured. "The lady will never know. Sam will never know. One can't break off all at once. Only to-night, and then I'll be different, then I'll serve her honest and get back the boy."

Mary's gentle personality seemed far away like the sunlight of the morning. That peaceful hour in the fresh white cottage was only a distant dream now, and the music of a cheering voice but the memory of long

ago. The mother forgot her child's kingdom as she fell beneath the attraction of a more powerful magnet. The memory of a boy in a spotless suit, with wondering blue eyes, standing by a stranger who smiled upon him sweetly, faded before the artificial light gleaming from the Lion's Claw.

Mrs. Benn felt her throat grow parched and dry as she looked up the road, hoping she was unobserved. The mad thirst was upon her with all the fury of dominion. So fixed were her thoughts upon this one object of attainment, she had not seen the people gathered in Mrs. Cray's front parlor, though she passed close to the open window. Now, as Sam's mother stood beneath the shadow of the Claw, she fancied an invisible arm drew her back, pinning her against the wall. For a moment she stood paralyzed, trying to recover from the sudden shock of this strange, uncanny sensation. Was she breathless from sharp walking or had some one really touched her? She trembled and felt unnerved as she asked herself the question.

"I want a drop of stimulant to pull me together," she said, wiping her brow. "I'm all of a shake and I don't know why. There's no one here to lay a hand on me, and yet—and yet—I thought——"

She dared not finish the sentence, but her knees knocked together and her feet felt glued to the ground.

Words spoken earlier in the day re-echoed through her brain with startling persistency, words she had no wish to remember:

"I could not allow a drunkard to associate with Sam."

The sentence took the form of colored letters shining before her eyes in the mellow twilight.

Yes, Mary had said that.

Then other recollections of the morning came unbidden, like ghosts on the twilight air:

"Remember the kingdom you have given Sam. A mother is the grandest thing on God's earth. You suffered and bore a human soul. Is that nothing to be proud of?"

Surely a voice spoke loudly in her ear, yet the path remained empty, while the light from the Lion's Claw still twinkled an insidious invitation.

"Don't feel very grand," muttered Mrs. Benn to herself. "But there, I'm not a strong woman, could never boast good health. Take the time Sam was born, I nearly died then. Perhaps it might 'ave been better—better for him and for me."

She checked the utterance, making an effort to move forward and reach the door, conscious some influence forced upon her a sense of opposition stronger even than the craving thirst, mightier than the foe which drew the widow to her old resort.

The voice came again, carried by the wind, hovering round her like a living presence.

"I am just going to trust you, that's all."

This time there could be no mistake. It spoke loudly to her dazzled brain, the voice she remembered well, yet Mrs. Benn was still alone.

Drops of terrified agony broke out upon her forehead as she pressed her hand to her heart with a little groan.

Yes, Mary had said that.

Sam's mother shook her fist at some unseen adversary, with an effort to throw off the paralyzing sensation of fear. At last she realized the nature of the voice and grew calmer at the knowledge.

"It's my cowardly conscience," she declared. "If I

start fair to-morrow, what can it matter what I do to-night? I'm not her servant yet, and Miss Aquila won't know."

The words proved comforting, and with their aid she braced her mind to defy any further mythical demonstration, telling herself it was a sign of lunacy to hear voices and feel the touch of unseen arms. Reassured, she smiled at the sound of the laughter within and turned to the door without further hesitation. As she did so suddenly a blue-clad figure appeared before her, standing in her path, looking her straight in the face with piercing eyes. As Mrs. Benn met the steady gaze, she turned white to her very lips. She tried to speak, to make some excuse, but utter confusion held her dumb.

"Good-evening," said Mary's pleasant voice, and this time it was no imaginary sound. "I am glad we met, for I was just thinking of you and hoping your shopping had proved successful. Come to me early in the morning, and then I can show you exactly what I want done."

Apparently the younger woman had not observed that ominous building in the background, appearing only conscious of Mrs. Benn's presence. Had they met in the grounds of Rutherwyke the speaker's manner could not have been more calmly trustful.

The defaulter, utterly unprepared for kindly words, could find no answer, but just stared stupidly at the sweet smiling features, knowing now that in some instinctive way she had anticipated Mary's proximity before seeing her. The warning was real; the nearness of a guardian angel made itself felt even to the dull and clouded brain.

"I must hurry back to Sam," continued Miss Aquila

briskly. "He is quite looking forward to your arrival in the morning. You see, I have explained to him you will be quite a different kind of mother. He is prepared to think everybody good and loving since he came to the White Cottage."

Mary held out her hand, which Mrs. Benn felt forced to take, though she knew she was unworthy and instinctively feared the contact. The firm grip conveyed more to the guilty spirit than any words Mary could have uttered. It was a hand of friendship drawing the waverer back to the firm shores of resolve. It thrilled the veins of the arm, sending a magnetic current all through that weak, unstable body till it carried a message direct to the soul in darkness. When at last the strong fingers relaxed their protecting hold Mrs. Benn's eyes were full of tears, which she winked back with a violent jerk of her head. Surely Miss Aquila must know what her presence had done for the wavering mother, surely she must guess those straying feet had wandered again to the edge of a precipice! All thought of the Lion's Claw was now unutterably distasteful to Mrs. Benn as she gasped out a grateful reply:

"I'll be with you quite early in the morning, never fear; and, by the way, miss, I have a few shillings over from the shopping. I—I'd like to give 'em back to you at once."

She produced the coins reserved for a final visit to the public house and forced them on the giver in feverish haste.

Mary gazed at the little pile of silver with a wonderfully happy expression.

"I see you are clever at shopping, Mrs. Benn, and I will keep the change for our Sam's money-box. I like to say 'our Sam,' though he belongs so much more to

you. I felt, the first moment I saw his sad little face, that I must be his guardian until he looked as he was meant to look—a bright, sunny, beautiful boy."

Mrs. Benn's heart was too full for speech. She could only mutter: "Bless you!" and nod farewell, conscious that all craving for drink had vanished mysteriously, while the joyful thoughts of the morning came back with a rush. Firmly now Sam's mother walked back toward her home, amazed beyond measure at her own strength after the unexpected encounter with Mary. As she passed Mrs. Cray's door a thin woman, with a deeply lined face, came slowly out, clasping her hands tightly on her breast, which heaved with emotional agitation. Her eyes were cast on the ground, her head was bent as if in reverence. She moved with the step of the deeply devout when they leave the altar rails in a sacramental service.

Mrs. Benn viewed her curiously, noting her strange walk and demeanor. Though their acquaintance was but a slight one, she ventured on a question.

"Been to a prayer meeting?" she asked.

Mrs. Jones looked up and sighed deeply, but it was not a sigh of sorrow.

"No," she replied and would have moved on without further explanation, since Mrs. Benn was distinctly unpopular with her neighbors, who resented her treatment of the boy and frequent visits to the Lion's Claw. But Sam's mother refused to be shaken off so easily. She longed for human companionship and sympathy.

"Heard any news?" she asked, keeping pace with the little old woman.

Mrs. Jones shook her head.

"Not likely to. Nobody tells me news these times; I'm very much alone. It was only by chance I got wind

of the cloak through one of the children who runs errands for me when my rheumatism is extra bad."

Mrs. Benn was too full of her own affairs to inquire the meaning of the words as she eagerly detailed her recent good fortune.

"I've had some work offered me, which I am real glad to accept, for I think it may just about save my reason! I brood a lot, and sorrowing for the dead don't do any one no good. I am going to look after a house in the Rutherwyke grounds, where the new lady gardener lives."

Mrs. Jones started so violently that her hands unclasped and fell to her sides. She looked excitedly now at her despised neighbor with growing wonder and incredulous surprise.

"You are going to Rutherwyke?" she gasped. "You are going to mind the White Cottage for Miss Aquila? Can you be speaking truth?"

Mrs. Benn smiled triumphantly, amused at the amazement her statement produced in the mind of the woman whose eyes were alight suddenly with unexpected fire.

"Seems funny, don't it? No one expected to see me starting off to service again. But I begin to-morrow; I've a smart rig-out and all, there's no mistake. It's a case of turning over a new leaf, making a fresh start. I mean to give up the Claw; went by there just now, but did I go in? Rather not! It's a low place, I tell you, and I've got to be careful and keep my situation."

She spoke with boastful assurance, unable to conceal the pride of conquest as she thought of her recent victory and the boy Mary called a king.

Mrs. Jones drew nearer and placed a trembling hand on Mrs. Benn's worn sleeve. At present it seemed impossible she could ever look tidy and respectable, but

the little old woman no longer doubted the truth of this strange news.

"It's just another proof," she whispered mysteriously, "another proof sure enough! It might convince even the most unbelieving."

The words were spoken with such awe that they thoroughly aroused Mrs. Benn's curiosity. With wrinkled brow she puzzled a moment in silence over their possible meaning, then, finding no clue, turned inquiringly to the speaker:

"I can't say as I follow what you are driving at, Mrs. Jones. Perhaps you would kindly make yourself clear."

A pause followed, then the one who had faith in Mary's powers to cure ills and bind up broken hearts drew courage for a startling announcement. She spoke low and breathlessly, glancing from right to left to make sure no one was in earshot.

"Maybe, Mrs. Benn, you missed all the talk to-day; probably you didn't hear about her very clothes having healing properties? Oh! Miss Aquila is not the same as other people; you get Mrs. Cray to tell. I don't say they know it up at Rutherwyke yet. Mind you, in the Bible, the Lord revealed things to babes that He hid from the wise and prudent. We poor folk have found her out precious quick, just as she has found us out in our afflictions and troubles. Don't you be in too great a hurry, but wait, and you'll discover in time what I mean. You look at her as I looked. I don't say you will see just what I saw. Not every one is given the same vision, not every one is ready, I take it, for a revelation. Perhaps you needed another kind of help; seems to me she knew that. Asking you to excuse my plain speaking this once, folks in our parts don't often

see you come by the Claw without popping in. Somebody made you pass that door, somebody stronger than yourself."

The truth of the words drove home. Mrs. Benn stared, with widely extended eyes, at the woman who framed these undisputed facts in a tone of sure conviction. Gradually she began to realize that possibly Mary had not, after all, appeared just by chance at the very moment of temptation. Mary may have known and understood, rebuking only with those far-seeing eyes which laid the soul bare.

"I take it you are alluding to Miss Aquila?"

Mrs. Jones nodded as she caught the tremulous whisper.

"I take it I am."

Mrs. Benn had reached her cottage. She cast a doubtful glance at the unwashed windows and strip of ill-kept garden, feeling, for the first time, ashamed of their forlorn appearance.

"Won't you come in?" she pleaded. "I want to 'ear all you've got to say, quiet like, and I don't fancy being alone just now; I'm feeling a bit scared. I cleaned up my room before I went out; the place isn't so bad inside. I'll be glad to make you a cup of tea and perhaps you could tell me some more about Miss Aquila."

Mrs. Jones hesitated. For months past no respectable woman cared to be seen crossing that threshold or speaking to Mrs. Benn. But Mary had wrought a change, Mary had made it possible.

"Thank you kindly. It seems nice to be able to talk of her to some one, especially now, since we've both seen her to-day and formed our own opinions. It's my belief this is only the beginning; it's my belief that soon——"

But she broke off, putting her finger to her lips as

a little group of workmen came tramping along the path. Then she added softly:

"Yes, indoors, quiet like, not here, where the folks are abroad catching what passes and making comments. There are things one must say in private, you know, things not to be named before those who scoff and cannot see with the eye of understanding."

The two women passed under Mrs. Benn's porch and the door closed. Only the men looked back and muttered with a short laugh: "Sober for once!"

In the distance the Lion's Claw at the top of the hilly street stood silhouetted against the sky, and beyond, toward Pilgrim's Way, Mary was nearing Rutherwyke, her new home.

Matthew watched her pass, but could find no excuse to speak or join her. He left his tea and meat untasted, while Hettie, still sulky and puzzled by his attitude, went up to see her sleeping boys. Tenderly she bent over them, thinking of the previous evening, when Mary stood by the little cots, looking down with such loving eyes on the small sweet faces. Afterward, too, when she explained the meaning of the Gabriel bell, Hettie's heart had quickened with some strange, unusual fervor. Now she moved instinctively to the window, lingering just where Mary's shadow fell as she recited the words of those mysterious chimes. In vain Hettie tried to recall the exact sentences, wishing they were written down that she might read them when the bell sounded. She liked to dwell upon those few brief twilight moments with the stranger whose voice fell on her ear like music and whose presence filled the room with light and gladness.

"The chimes tell," she murmured, "of an angel coming suddenly to the Virgin Mary and blessing her and saying she was to pray for sinners, yet Miss Aquila

looked sad as she said the words. It seemed as if she disapproved."

Hettie glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece.

"Fast, I suppose," she murmured and waited for the sound of the distant Gabriel bell. Silence reigned in the still house, silence reigned outside, for the birds had gone to roost and the road below was empty.

Presently she put her head through the door and called in a low voice to Matthew:

"What's the time? The clock up here seems all wrong."

For a moment he felt inclined to ignore the question or answer rudely, she had best come down and look for herself. Then he thought of the children in bed, and, fearing an altercation might disturb them, replied moodily: "Ten past seven."

Hettie forgot her sleeping twins as she re-echoed the words in shrill, unguarded accents:

"Ten past seven! Never! Are you sure?"

She came running down the stairs with a clatter of high heels.

"Yes. What's all the fuss about?"

Hettie stood looking at him with her lips slightly parted and her hands pressed together.

"There must be something wrong up at Rutherwyke," she said. "The Gabriel bell has not rung for the first time this many a year. I listened for it to-night particularly. Somehow to-day I seemed thinking of the meaning which came new to me last evening, and when I woke this morning I tried to recall what Miss Aquila had said. I was dreaming that the bell repeated her name over and over again."

Matthew, who had just sat down to light a pipe and read a paper, sprang to his feet.

"Are you sure?" he asked. "Are you quite sure it didn't ring?"

Hettie nodded a violent assent, which made her sham tortoise-shell pins shoot from the rolls of hair piled high on an overtowering pad.

Already Matthew was out again in the road.

"Porterton always rings it," he said, "only at times he leaves a note in the potting shed or somewhere, asking me to be responsible. I oblige him when I can, if it's inconvenient to be back by seven. It is as much as his place is worth to forget that bell. The master listens sharp enough and expects it as regularly as his meals. Porterton will trust no one but me with the job, and he always sends to know if I got the note. I'll run up to Rutherwyke straight away and inquire. Somebody will be blamed, for if Mr. Penreath gets a fad into his head, it takes him badly, and he is especially cranky on this subject."

The occurrence completely banished from Matthew's mind his quarrel with Hettie, and he waved a friendly hand as he started off at a brisk pace in the direction of the garden.

At Rutherwyke Place the absence of the usual chimes caused general consternation. Josephine hastened to her husband's studio and burst in with the news. "Porterton has not sounded the Gabriel bell," she said, a note of keen anxiety in her voice. "I am afraid he must be ill. I wouldn't have had it happen for worlds—you know why."

Arrow looked at her long and steadily, then he said in a voice so low and controlled that it momentarily calmed her nerves and stilled the wild beating of her heart:

"Porterton never forgets. The bell was not rung tonight by my orders."

Josephine could hardly believe the cold, calculating words came from her husband and stared at him as if some other man had spoken through his lips. Then suddenly her usual reserve gave way before a storm of unexplained passion and bitter resentment. Until this moment she little guessed that the sounding of the Gabriel bell had become in her mind an overpowering superstition, a note of pleasure when she woke, a soothing music at eventide.

"Arrow," she cried, angry with him for the first time in all her married years, "is it possible you ordered the bell not to be rung and never told me? Surely you must have realized how upset and frightened I should be. I have warned you often enough that when the bell stopped, its silence would mean the coming of disaster to us and to our house. I have felt this always, only lately the conviction has taken a stronger hold."

She pressed her fingers to her cheeks and breathed hard. He could see the swift rise and fall of her bodice, on which a gleaming diamond cross lay. Her face became suddenly so alive with emotional upheaval that its very intensity appealed to his love of all that was vital and startling in life. She had developed, with alarming rapidity, from the gentle Josephine of his happy working days into a new character-study, with primitive beliefs and wild, unstable fears. He came nearer and placed his hands on her shoulders, hearing her repeat under her breath:

"I have felt this always—always."

Despite her obvious suffering, he could not help smiling at such a childish exhibition of dread.

"Why are you afraid?" he asked, and his voice sounded very lenient, as if arguing with one mentally and physically weak. He saw the tears gleaming in her

eyes, he heard the sob that broke in her throat. She answered with head still drooping and shoulders bent beneath his touch:

"I don't know—that is the worst of it—I think really I am frightened chiefly because I don't know. I have felt overwhelmed and nervous ever since I first saw Mary. It was very cruel, after what I said this morning, to—to give me an extra shock to-night."

For a moment he tried to recall their conversation on that very spot earlier in the day, when the sun danced in at the windows, mocking superstitious terrors and putting them to shame.

"Let me see, what did you say?" he murmured pensively.

Josephine had forgotten the exact words, and in her effort to remember the falling tears ceased and the terror faded from her face.

"I told you, did I not, that I thought there was some strange mystery about Mary? I spoke of the weird psychological effect she had upon me—how when I felt warm, the warmth apparently came from her, and afterward—when my flesh began to creep—I fancied I was walking with a person who was not real."

Arrow smoothed his wife's hair, looking into her troubled eyes with an expression of concern.

"Ah! yes, it all comes back to me now, but once I began to work it passed from my mind as a folly not worth considering. I hardly thought you spoke in earnest. As to the Gabriel bell, why, often I've heard you joking about it to strangers. You told an evangelical visitor it was rung for the servants' meals just the other day. He quite believed you, and thought you only allowed them early breakfast and supper at seven."

Arrow tried to laugh away her fit of depression. He

felt somewhat ashamed to think he had forgotten his wife's fears and theories, while Mary's words lived in his mind with a clearness that was almost uncanny. Again and again throughout the day he fancied he heard the voice of the newcomer saying in that strangely arresting manner: "I do not like the Gabriel bell."

Josephine's sudden apprehension lessened under Arrow's smile.

"But still," she said, "I can't understand why a practice of years should cease to-day. There must be some reason for it, Arrow."

He glanced at his sketches of the passion flowers gathered early that morning, well pleased with his treatment of their tender color and mysterious form.

"You know," he murmured, "my picture of the Madonna is to be the Mary who desires no worship, the Mary who shrinks back, with hands raised deprecatingly, as if to ward off a great flood of misdirected worship. Her face implores the world to pass her over, to spare her the veneration for which she was never intended. She is appalled to find herself a gold-crowned saint decked in rich robes, to know that the world's children bow the knee to her, a simple handmaid, whose personal history lies in shadow, unrecorded save by a few brief sentences in the inspired Word. To paint a picture that arrests the public imagination and carries a message one must always live in the subject conditionally. The first step toward this new idea of mine was to lessen the injustice of forcing homage upon an unwilling queen, to respect the humble, retiring attitude of one who was verily blessed among women, though meek and gloriously simple."

A light broke over Josephine's face. "I see," she whispered—"oh! I see it all now. It comforts me to

hear the explanation. I must try not to mind, but to think about the picture instead. Perhaps it will be the greatest work of your life."

He dared not tell her that Mary Aquila's words influenced him to change the old custom he had grown to love, rather he wished Josephine to believe the idea was all his own. In silencing the bell he was paving the way to gaining a wish which gradually developed into a strong and masterful desire. The newcomer should sit to him, whatever her objections. He vowed in his heart he would never rest until he won her consent and also her sympathy. She must be willing to show in her eyes the passion of rebellion, unconsciously revealed that morning. All day he had felt the thrill of her strongly expressed theory, which in time should develop, through his genius, into color and being.

More than once he unconsciously repeated a brief prayer taught him by an old Catholic nurse when a child:

"Oh! Mary, mother of all grace, parent of mercy, protect us from our cruel foe, receive us in death's hour of woe."

As if in answer, he said the words he fancied this Mary of the canvas would cry to those who prayed, said them to stimulate his mind as he painted and drew the mental picture of a tortured Madonna: "I cannot protect you, for I am not God. I cannot receive you, since other arms are stretched out—waiting, stronger, surer, safer arms, wherein the soul may find a refuge. If I could give redemption, why did the Child of my womb suffer His holy Passion? I am no gate of the High King, for He Himself is the door, the invitation, the feast, the fount of joy eternal. You pierce Him with the sharp sword of doubt, you mistrust His gentle

call when you pray aloud to me: 'Holy Mother, intercede for us.' "

Josephine looked up into her husband's face, unable to read what was passing there, conscious his thoughts were far away and that her interruption had proved unwelcome.

"I am sorry," she whispered, "for my betrayal of weakness. I never knew I was superstitious until to-night."

Arrow patted her shoulder soothingly.

"Oh! yes," he replied, "you knew it this morning. I think we have experienced a superstitious day. You were a prophet of evil too, you spoke of disaster coming to our house and all because you were a little puzzled by Miss Aquila."

Josephine realized the truth of the remark.

"Perhaps I shall get used to Mary soon," she said, with an effort at brightness, too forced to deceive Arrow. "Probably in time I shall see things more clearly and understand the woman whom Constance Eastlake described as absolutely trustworthy and able to exert an extraordinary influence for good."

Mrs. Penreath was thinking of the letter in which the lady gardener had been so thoroughly recommended. She wondered if Arrow would remember the heat from the singing flames drawing the sheet of paper from her hands, to bury it in the bosom of ruddy fire. She could not forget how clearly the name "Mary" stood out in letters of gold before their astonished eyes, and longed to ask her husband if he also recalled the incident. But she kept the question back. He might think her too fanciful after her recent display of nerves.

"Then I suppose," she said, "the Gabriel bell will not ring to-morrow?"

He shook his head, while his lips framed a wordless "no."

"Never again?" she queried, and her voice sounded sorrowful.

"Never again," repeated her husband in a tone of finality.

Josephine sighed.

"I wish I had known this morning. It is like hearing the voice of an old friend, without realizing that voice has spoken for the last time. Afterward you yearn for just one word to treasure above all others. How I should have listened had I known!"

Arrow smiled away her despondency.

"When you see the picture," he declared with that triumphant belief in his own powers which paved the way to success, "you will realize that the bell had to be silent, that it grew dumb for a great purpose, and the sacrifice was not in vain."

"Shall I?" said Josephine.

His cheerful look confirmed the words.

"Yes, and Mary Aquila is to sit for me. We begin to-morrow."

He made the statement boldly. It was more than a guess; it amounted to conviction, filling him with a pleasurable sensation of attainment.

"Oh! then she has consented?" queried Josephine, not concealing her astonishment as she remembered the definite refusal of the morning. "Do tell me how you managed to work the oracle so quickly?"

Arrow was arranging his brushes, and she thought the question failed to reach his ear. She did not repeat it, for she saw he looked exceptionally weary.

"I am very glad," she declared softly. "I ought not to be surprised, for you always get your own way in the

end. I feared she was entirely opposed to sitting. You could not find a better model for your conception of the Madonna. Mary's eyes are wonderfully speaking and true; then the spirituality of her face is, if possible, even greater than its beauty. Catch the spirit, and you will do an extraordinary piece of work."

Arrow listened, then left the studio without replying, moving silently away with tired tread.

Perhaps he was ashamed of that bold statement, "We begin to-morrow," lest Josephine should discover it had been spoken without foundation. What if Mary disappointed him, meeting his persuasions with a firm, uncompromising "no"? How could he face the death of those hopes which rose so high, bringing before his dazzled eyes the vision of success? In the past the world had hailed him famous, but at heart he knew the golden ladder stretched high above his head to dizzy pinnacles of desire. At present pictures were pictures and little else, but he had dreams of breathing into art the true, the deathless spirit of divinity. With dogged decision he repeated again, "We begin to-morrow," then added fervently: "God knows we must!"

CHAPTER XI

THE FIRST SITTING

TO Arrow's surprise, the following morning Mary sought him of her own free will, and her first words were those of genuine gratitude, spoken without shyness or hesitation.

"Vines told me I should find you here," she said, "and I wanted to thank you for something you did to please me yesterday. I thought it very considerate, very kind."

The artist was pacing up and down the Monk's Walk for ten minutes' sharp exercise before his work in the studio. He preferred taking a brief constitutional in the grounds of Rutherwyke to wandering far afield, knowing well that once he passed the iron gates he laid himself open to public scrutiny and the boring overtures of so-called friends. Being a popular personality, he was almost bound to encounter some acquaintance eager to catch the pearls that fell from the lips of genius. His most commonplace utterance would be twisted into a witticism or *bon mot*. Arrow realized that if by chance a congenial topic should be started, a sudden flow of eloquence would carry him away, annihilating all memory of time, stealing the precious daylight from his easel, making him forget the task at home. So putting aside temptation or the risk of boredom, he remained safely within his little world of tree and blossom.

Often he found himself sincerely pitying his less fortunate brethren, who possessed no kingdom of their own, no garden sanctuary, where grand old trees raised mighty arms on high and flowered acres gave their lavish treasures of bloom, color and scent to decorate the daily lives of those who reared and loved them.

Now he looked curiously at Mary, feeling, during the hours of darkness, he had partially forgotten that strangely spiritual and illuminating beauty. Once more it burst upon him with something of shock—pleasurable, exciting, mysterious, elusive. He recalled all Josephine had said and no longer marveled at his wife's hysterical mood. An imaginative woman might well see in Mary many unusual and almost unearthly attributes.

"I am glad," he replied, "that I was able to please you. I pondered over your words and resolved to reverence them, with the result I forbade the Angelus to be rung again while Rutherwyke belongs to me. I sacrificed my darling fad, my favorite fancy not without a struggle. A friend's voice, a household superstition was silenced forever, because you so frankly gave me your reasons for disliking the Gabriel bell. Perhaps you did not know you gave me something else as well. Can you guess what it was?"

A faint pink flush glowed over Mary's mother-of-pearl skin. She answered frankly enough, though by her manner she appeared slightly embarrassed.

"I gave you a new idea for your work," she replied with conviction. "You are going to help my crusade in a far better way than by silencing those chimes with their morning and evening prayer. You are going to preach the lesson through the power of your brush, through pictured lips which your genius alone can make alive. They will speak to the hearts, if not to the ears,

of all who see your canvas. You are going to paint the Mary I described to you, suffering the weight of misdirected supplication, the Mary who cannot give and cannot answer, the Mary who is outraged at finding herself in the place of Divinity. This Mary is to come into the world through your power of expression, through the brush of inspiration and the pulpit of the picture."

Her words stirred the blood in Arrow's veins as vividly as they imaged before him the scene he would call into being. With startling clearness he could trace the whole preconceived scheme. A woman standing by a rude shrine, cut in a wall or hewn in the niche of a rugged cliff, the work of unskilled hands, containing a grotesque and brightly colored image of the Virgin Mary. The woman gazes in horror at the stars on the gaudy robe, at the large necklace and overpowering crown. Her face has blanched with scorn and agonized rebellion. She—the real Mother, the materialized Madonna—shrinks back appalled at this travesty of her simple womanhood, while with hands outstretched she tries to shake off the prayers which throng upon her, the entreaties she is powerless to grant. A moving and painful picture, one which the artist knew might offend and wound, one which might ruin his popularity, one which might lift him high above the criticism of the world.

"If I help you," said Arrow slowly, speaking as if each word were of paramount importance, "you must contribute your share, you must not draw back or shirk the responsibility. Remember you have inspired the idea. No face could say what your eyes expressed to me yesterday, when I disputed with you for the pure pleasure of argument. Later on my wife brought you a message. She asked you to be my model, and I under-

stand you practically declined. To-day I ask you again (without fear of a refusal) to represent that very same Mary you yourself described and help me catch the spirit of the teaching. With your influence and aid I may paint the masterpiece of my life, without your help I stand apart—undone. It is for you to decide—you who are clever enough to know that through the eye the garden of the soul may be cultivated. Surely these Rutherwyke grounds can spare you for a few hours each day to do your wider work, to reach far—so far beyond its walls. You are unselfish and will understand that the picture can only be attempted by the co-operation of its originator. You fired me with your own enthusiasm. You planted the seed in my mind. From the mere germ of a thought, it developed to a great ambition."

Mary listened with a glad smile. Was it merely fancy or were the birds raising their shrill songs to higher notes of exaltation? The long line of silver trees in the Monk's Walk looked strangely ethereal with the pale morning haze drifting over their shapely foliage. At last she said:

"If I can be of use, if indeed you want my help, then I must give it gladly in return for your sacrifice of the Gabriel bell. Perhaps you are right and the work could not be done without me. Yesterday it would have been possible, but yesterday you were merely contemplating an allegorical picture, thinking, as you have thought a hundred times before, of the work for fame's sake and the whole joy of success. To-day a nobler element is permeating your wish to achieve. You feel you must give out the best that is in you for the sake of a dead woman sadly misunderstood. Could she come back she would thank you—knowing your desire was pure,

prompted by no worldly motive. She would remember that the man who silenced the bell was her champion and give you her woman's blessing from a grateful heart."

The words were hardly breathed above a whisper and came with a compelling power, as though from some source of hidden knowledge. They stirred the artist strangely, bringing before his mental vision the Mary who would thank him, but the voice and eyes were still those of Mary Aquila, gentle, pleading, infinitely persuasive.

For a moment he made no answer, then turned with one of those quick gestures with which he habitually emphasized his statements.

"It's time," he said, "that some one tried to show her as she is, apart from imaginary literature and gaudy paintings. She has been victimized too long by the misrepresentation of centuries. She must speak for herself, she must rise above the man-made legends, invented by human minds to destroy her real spirit. After all, how little they know, how little we know. Her great work of maiden-motherhood makes but brief history in the Bible. It is passed over so quickly, we are left unsatisfied, thirsting for more. When the wonderful Christmas story has been told, she resumes her simple life unattended by the appearance of angels, returning from the manger to her humble abode. There she takes up the duties of the world, the grind of poverty, the daily cares of home, little dreaming that throughout the ages she will stand as an object of devotion. My painting will reveal her wonder, surprise, sorrow, despair as she sees the pilgrims kneeling at her shrine, sees them, but cannot bid them go. Therein lies the whole tragedy of my picture. She fights against her glory in vain; she falls

crushed beneath countless ages of error and superstition."

He watched Mary's face as he spoke, watched it with an artist's eye, noting the changing expression, the coloring, the character. Already in his brain he commenced his difficult work; these were no idle moments, though they walked over the moss-grown path in the heat-mist of the morning. He loved the subject of which he spoke; it arrested his imagination, making strong appeals.

"Some of the old stories," he continued, seeing she listened attentively, "were quite cruel; they represented the Virgin as an avenging angel, working vindictive spells. One I remember tells how she appeared at Thetford to a poor woman and commanded her to warn the prior he must build a chapel on the north side of the choir in the parish church of St. Mary. The woman is supposed, for some unexplained reason, to have neglected the message, and the legend runs that the Virgin came again by night and much blamed her for overlooking the command, touching her arm, which immediately became paralyzed. Then the woman woke, and running to the monk, told him her misfortune. He advised her to offer an arm made of wax to the Holy Mother, which being done, her own arm was speedily restored."

Mary listened with a faint smile. Arrow noticed that she accepted all he told her as if she had known it long before, yet her face was full of interest and sympathy. He wondered she made no comment on the story.

"When would you like me to sit?" she asked. "I hope it won't take all my time from the garden. There is so much to be done, and I came to Rutherwyke full of ideas

for future work. If you can spare me now, I am wanted in the orchid house, where Vines is waiting."

Arrow, pinned suddenly down to the necessity of making plans, felt as if he had been roused from a dream dominated by the blue-gowned figure standing between the line of conifers. To return to actualities, to touch earth again, was positive pain.

"Oh! of course we begin at once," he declared, glancing at his watch. "This brief constitutional is the tribute I pay to that mundane tyrant digestion. Now that I have stirred my blood and breathed the air, for the rest of the day I stay in and work."

Mary glanced anxiously across the large stretch of cultivated ground which lay beyond the Monk's Walk.

"But you will let me see Vines first," she pleaded. "I must warn him of my absence and leave some instructions for the men. He will have to take the lead while I am engaged in the studio. He won't object, I feel sure. He likes a little brief authority and certainly works all the better for being ambitious. He confessed to me last night he had no idea there was so much to learn; that was a great advance and made me very hopeful for his future. I dread the man who believes he knows everything; he is always difficult to deal with. I have long since discovered every day gives out its meed of instruction. Why, you have taught me a great deal even this morning, far more than you could ever guess."

Arrow looked pleased. Accustomed as he was to commanding attention, he feared he might seem vapid to this new Mary of the garden, with the broad forehead and deep eyes of understanding.

"What have I taught you?" he asked, eager to hear more. But instinctively she turned her face from him, hastening her steps to avoid answering the question.

He followed her, though he did not ask again what lesson she had gleaned from their recent conversation. His pride resented her silent attitude.

"I can give you a quarter of an hour, not a moment longer. You know the studio door; I will be waiting for you there."

His words were short, sharp, decisive, warning her not to delay.

Mary bowed her head in mute consent.

"You won't fail me?" he added almost sternly.

The answer came at once in the voice that could soothe as well as inspire.

"No, you need not be afraid. Were I to fail, I should be very ungrateful."

Arrow walked swiftly at her side, still a little ruffled.

"I always impress punctuality on my models," he said. "When the work-fever lays hold of me, it is terrible to be kept waiting. I fear I have the reputation for driving hard and expecting too much from human nature. I quite exhausted the small boy who posed as Pan in my 'Sentiment of Spring.' By the way, what is happening to that child up at the cottage?"

Faint curiosity stirred in his mind at the sudden recollection of Sam.

"Oh! the boy is all right, thank you," replied Mary, glancing back over her shoulder, for she had outpaced Arrow. "You see, his mother is with him."

The artist remembered Josephine telling him that Miss Aquila was trying to reform Mrs. Benn.

"Then I should think," he retorted, "the poor little wretch is anything but all right."

Mary paused and pointed in the direction of the cottage.

"If you have any doubt," she said, "walk down there

and see for yourself. The door is open; you can go straight in. Sam is already losing his shyness and will be delighted to welcome a visitor."

She turned in the direction of the conservatories, and Arrow, anxious to discover if Mary were right, made his way toward her home. As he neared its fresh white walls he walked quietly, keeping behind the shade of the holly hedge. The spotless cottage in that tranquil corner of Rutherwyke appeared an ideal setting for his new Madonna. He forgot for the moment it had ever been inhabited by the plebeian Mr. and Mrs. Monk with their musty furniture and an inborn love for closed windows. He saw in it now only the casket that held a jewel fair enough to move the great heart of the world to speechless admiration.

From his hiding-place Arrow could see Mrs. Benn kneeling on Mary's doorstep in a clean print dress, busily scrubbing away invisible marks from its spotless surface. Beside her a shining pail of soap-suds caught the first rays of sun glinting through the mist, and from this store of treasure Sam, seated on a three-legged stool, blew radiant bubbles on the morning air. He looked the very essence of childish content as his large, deeply set eyes followed the journey of each transparent globe till its thousand colors vanished into the bosom of calm, untroubled space.

He turned to prattle to his mother, explaining the various missions of the beauty-balls he blew heavenward. Evidently he hoped they would reach the one of whom he thought as they fluttered away to carry a wish or convey a message.

"That is for the lady who wore the beads from the sea," he said as Arrow came within earshot, and involuntarily the artist conjured the scene of baby hands

clutching Josephine's pearls and asking for an explanation of their smooth, mysterious beauty.

"And this is to tell Mary to come back soon," he cried gleefully as he blew an extra fine specimen in the direction of the glass houses.

Mrs. Benn looked up, and Arrow perceived she was smiling widely.

"Haven't you one for mother?" she asked. "Mustn't forget mother, you know."

Sam dipped his little pipe eagerly into the pail.

"Oh! yes," he said, preparing to blow. "She shall have a great big, bright one. I'll send it right away to the Lion's Claw."

Triumphantly he set a blue-mauve specimen of fragile beauty floating before Mrs. Benn's uplifted eyes. She watched it a moment with parted lips and an expression of speechless horror, then her head fell on her breast, and Arrow saw that she was crying.

As she fumbled for a handkerchief, Sam stared wonderingly at her falling tears. For a moment he said nothing, then suddenly dropped his pipe, and, running to her side, flung his small body into her arms, whispering words of consolation in her ear. The child realized he had hurt the weeping woman, and his youthful mind felt troubled, at a loss to know the reason of her sorrow. Arrow did not wait to see the conclusion of the scene. He felt it was too sacred for the prying eye of man and left it to angel witnesses, hoping they would record in some great book of love that tear of penitence and that piercing look of mother-sorrow.

When Mary came to the studio he told her he had walked to the cottage, merely adding all was well with the child.

"I thought so," she said cheerfully. "I left the

mother this morning brushing that wonderful hair of his with a very gentle touch, as if she were terribly afraid of the ivory brush, a present from Lady Constance with my name on it in gold. I do not like such elaborate things, but she made me keep it, so now I have given it to Sam, and he is tremendously proud of the possession."

Mary was standing by the large stretch of canvas which sooner or later would glow to life under the artist's brush.

"Genius is rather like a miracle," she said. "It's wonderful to look at that plain surface and know you can change it into a masterpiece by a special gift which raises your work to the mountain heights, above the valleys of unskilled labor. Do you ever think of the struggling artists who would give their very souls for your powers of creation? So many produce quite good work after years of patient study, yet just a faint lack of divine inspiration keeps them poor and unknown. Their wings are cut and they will never soar. They think the world's determination not to recognize them is cruel and unjust, but really the world is so full of its own passionate heartbeats, it cannot respond to strained sentiment or false beauty. The great lights alone can draw and dazzle the crowd; they shine out as planets among lesser stars, while the patient, hard-working majority merely swell the milky way and are lost in a dim, unrecognized throng."

Mary spoke sadly and Arrow listened with rapt attention, as if the words were precious, gleaned from lips of authority. Then suddenly he remembered, with a start, she was only the lady gardener, speaking her thoughts aloud and not attempting to voice any deep or particularly original view of life's obvious tragedies.

He took up a large sheet of foolscap on which he had written a description of the picture existing only in his brain.

"This is my idea," he said. "I have tried to explain the attitude, expression and meaning of the central figure in the scene which your words first conjured in my mind. Read it, and perhaps you will be able to pose yourself spontaneously, without my help."

Never before had Arrow suggested to any model, however skilled, that she should pose herself.

As a rule he was arbitrary and hard to please. He would take a human form as if it were a lay figure, twisting and molding it with difficulty to the desired shape. Professional models knew from experience or hearsay that he was extraordinarily oblivious of the comfort of his sitters. However strained their attitudes, he insisted upon torturous positions being retained almost beyond human endurance. Yet, to be a model of Arrow Penreath's, was the making of the man or woman desiring that particular kind of employment, and they seldom resented his harsh treatment. Perhaps they divined that the man (who was kindness itself outside the studio) became, when at work, merged in the artist. They knew instinctively his whole being was controlled by feverish excitement or uncanny exaltation. They could see that he utterly forgot his puppets were flesh and blood; they only held for him the personality of the picture. When pleased, he would burst into song and talk to himself aloud, recognizing no spirit save his own, apparently unconscious of their presence. To smaller minds this preoccupation was awe-inspiring and almost terrible, flashing before the model's tired eyes the revelation of a soul aflame with genius. For such a

spectacle they suffered willingly the great man's lack of consideration.

As Mary scanned the words put into her hands she saw at once the artist merely re-echoed her thoughts, building up his picture on the idea she had suggested to him, little dreaming it would influence his work. To throw herself into the part was easy enough. She moved to the platform with the natural grace which delighted him, so rare and yet so precious in its subtle charm. He watched her with enraptured eyes, his whole mind riveted upon every line of her well-poised body. He considered himself a judge of beauty at its best, but Mary was the most baffling type ever placed beneath the microscope of criticism. She was strong, yet ethereal, full of startling contrasts. Her face, pale one moment, glowed the next with a sudden rush of vivid red. Her eyes were always changing in color or expression, unlike any he had ever met on earth. They were dream-eyes and belonged to the province of unreality or worlds immortal. She seemed to him like some mysterious being materialized from the elements. She was part of the summer breeze and sun. He fancied her soul must be mated to calm blue depths of the sea or vast azure of eternal skies. To love her would mean something more than passion or the material ties of earth. Her smile kindled the sacred fires of devotion. To love Mary would be like loving Nature in her finest mood—the ocean tranquil and wide, the high heavens when their richest tints shone forth, the leaves catching the light through transparent veins, the wind singing softly its eerie note from unseen lips. As these tender reveries rose before his mental vision, he suddenly realized Mary had fallen into the pose, apparently without effort. Mary was waiting with the plea on her face which cried

to the world: "Have pity on Joseph's wife!" The eyes looking down upon Arrow from the models' platform not only held vast histories of pain and misrepresentation for the one who knew, they spoke with such silent eloquence that all who looked might read. The purity of the maiden-spirit when the angel Gabriel appeared shone in those depths of concentrated light; the pondering of a heart overflowing with the pure devotion of motherhood lay revealed to the wondering gaze of men. Arrow held his breath as he read the story spoken by those large Madonna-like eyes. Mingling with earlier impressions came the pain of future watching, when derision and shame fell heavily on the Son she had so miraculously borne.

Even as Arrow watched Mary's face it stiffened with livid horror, a flood of agony dilating the eyes till every feature faded into shadow under their tearless misery. They were the eyes of the mother who looked upon cruel torture. They were the eyes that saw the nails tearing at the dear flesh—once of her body. They were the eyes which turned to the disciple when a faint voice gently commanded her to behold another son.

Arrow suddenly gripped his brushes fiercely which a moment since he had idly handled. He wanted to make sure they were real, for now, as in moments of faintness, the walls of the studio whirled round, the models' platform looked far away, he felt himself drifting into limitless space, yet he was strong of build, robustly constituted and had never fainted in his life. With an effort he pulled himself together while the giddiness passed, but still he could see that terrible look on Mary's face, as her eyes stared fixedly at a distant object in the long, lofty studio.

"Please take it away," she said, and her voice sounded

like a whisper drifting toward him through space. "I cannot stay here if you do not take it away."

He turned eagerly to inspect his many treasures, collected with care, each admitted to his working sanctum for some special reason or sentiment.

"Take what away?" he asked.

She pointed with a trembling hand to a white object hung against a deep purple curtain.

"That crucifix," she said.

Arrow went to the carved ivory relic from a foreign land and obeyed the request without a word. He read in Mary's eyes the vision of Calvary and knew that she possessed the strange power of actually becoming the personality the artist wished her to imitate. He looked upon this mood as a fortunate piece of self-hypnotism on the part of a woman whose whole nature was bound together by far-reaching and limitless sympathy. Instinctively he fell in with the dramatic idea, sharing this strange and unexpected mood. She was no longer merely his model, no longer the lady gardener of Rutherwyke, but instead he saw her as the outraged saint of his picture, a mother come to disown the great position her worshipers would force upon her and bid her claim.

He turned to his easel without a word, feeling it was unnecessary to speak the approval his eyes alone expressed, and began to sketch in her outline just as she stood, all unquestioned, her own attitude, her own thought, powerfully guiding the will and the hand of the man accustomed to rule.

Neither wished to break the spell of silence. To speak of commonplace matters to the stately figure which drew to itself all the spiritual atmosphere and sanctity of the past would have seemed to Arrow an act of blasphemy. The hours flew and time was as nothing

to the work in hand. He lost all sense of human endeavor or physical fatigue. His mental capacity appeared sharpened by contact with his model's attitude. No plea to rest, no word of complaint reminded him she was of earth.

So Arrow labored on and on, while Mary stood looking into his soul, weaving her magic, giving forth inspiration, feeding his fancy with pictures shown by those dazzling, unearthly eyes, telling him without speech the secrets of sorrow, the messages of motherhood and revealing all the pathos of repudiated majesty.

Once or twice the artist's wife passed his studio door, but dared not enter, and noting the silence, instinctively felt glad.

"Mary does not trouble to talk," she said. "Perhaps it is just as well."

Josephine lingered outside, half ashamed to listen, yet compelled by burning curiosity. Then, after a long interval, she moved away reassured, murmuring happily:

"Yes, it is just as well!"

CHAPTER XII

MONK CALLS AT THE WHITE COTTAGE

THE day's work was over and Mary sat alone in her cottage, watching the sleeping child. Mrs. Benn had left with a singularly happy expression on her face, after pressing farewell kisses upon Sam's ruddy cheek, colored by long hours in the sun. That silent effort in the studio seemed to Mary dream-like and far away now, as the faint thread of the rising moon silvered a bank of clouds behind the tall trees of Rutherwyke. She realized the artist's brush had worked with something more than ordinary inspiration and power. He touched the borderland of supernatural guides. Unseen hands stretched their invisible fingers to influence each stroke of genius, directing its course, making progress swift and sure, lifting him to heights hitherto unknown. She thought, with lingering pleasure, of the man's joy in his splendid toil. How strangely his face glowed and his eyes kindled as he stood by the canvas like a magician, eager to enchant the world, to catch in some wondrous spell all the earth-bound senses of human souls, crushed beneath their weight of clay, imprisoned by material desires and the lust of common things.

"I am giving to them," his face seemed to say. "I must make them feel, appreciate and know. I can build my story in color and form, I can breathe life into it, even as the Creator quickens the pulses of unborn chil-

dren. I am able to bring forth and make live; I am blessed—and must bless in return."

Only once during that long vigil did Mary speak, and then her voice interrupted a deep sigh of content, which came from the artist with a blissful sense of self-satisfaction.

Perhaps Mary saw the sudden drawing back of those shadow-hands guiding his brush, for she bent forward with an air of anxiety, fear lurking in her eyes as she whispered fervently:

"Do not triumph too soon, beware of a fall! This is only the beginning. It is early to be glad. Wait till the evening of endeavor. As yet you have done so little."

For a moment her words chilled him like a touch of distant winter when summer is in the heart. Then he laughed softly, murmuring: "But never so well!" and fell to working with increased energy. Of course he knew he was relying, to an extraordinary extent, upon the caprice of the model. If she willed, she could instantly ruin the picture by a jarring word or cruel jest, which would shatter the subtle atmosphere of a presence sacred and unreal. But Arrow's fears were needless. Not for one moment did Mary throw off the character she took upon her shoulders with such natural dignity and pure intention. Even when they parted he fancied she still maintained the rôle and that sacred motherhood beamed through her eyes with the light of spiritual fire. The sorrows and joys of the Blessed Virgin were mirrored in the Madonna-like features of Rutherwyke's Mary as surely as the sunlight lingered in the calm skies above.

He spoke in warm tones to Josephine that evening of Mary's genius as a model.

"I have engaged the best professional sitters of the day," he declared, "and not one of them has shown half Miss Aquila's endurance, patience or power of expression. The way she keeps her face is superb. It gives a man his full chance; it provides magnificent material to work from and is, of course, a talent of no mean order. The physical strain must naturally be felt, but she will not own to this, so I see I shall be finely spoiled for all who come after."

While Arrow held forth on the subject of Mary's success in the studio a man crept stealthily up the drive, seeking the shelter of the trees, glad when the shadows from overspreading boughs mingled with his own.

The dining-room windows stood open, and he could see the lights within and trace the figures of the artist and his wife as they sat at the flower-decked table. Up and down the shady walks the dim gaze of the silent-footed man traveled, with a certain lingering affection and a certain look of veiled horror. Then suddenly he put up his hands to his brow, for the sight of the familiar place set his temples throbbing and his eyes burning. He was nervous of being seen; he felt like a burglar trespassing on ground where his presence was both unwelcome and forbidden. He told himself he had done well to come at night, in the silence and the gloom. The scandal of his sudden dismissal from Rutherwyke spread on swift wings of rumor through Abbotts Brooke, and now Monk could no longer bear to face his friends, feeling they might believe him guilty and shun his presence.

With an inward struggle to maintain the difficult attitude of silence, Mrs. Monk refrained from repeating to her husband the treatment she had received from Hettie Vines. The good woman knew too well how

deeply such a story would affect the already oversensitive man, though to speak of it might have brought personal comfort to her heavily burdened breast. More than once the reviling of Hettie and an indignant description of her behavior in the street trembled on Mrs. Monk's lips, all but rippling off her tongue, but she conquered the impulse nobly. To keep it back, to smother the burning sense of injustice and crush its poisonous sting was a hard trial to one accustomed to repeat every incident of the day, sure of a sympathetic listener. Only the thought of all he had suffered enabled her to overcome the temptation and bear the memory of the slight alone.

The usually heavy tread of Monk's broad feet upon the gravel sounded muffled now. He walked with caution, fancying the very stones must have turned against him and would, if possible, cry out that he intruded. Yet behind this fear came the memory, bitter in its sweetness, of loving years of labor given to the soil, when Rutherwyke bloomed and prospered beneath his care. His work had been his life, the dearest treasure of his heart. To him it was precious as the work of fame in which Arrow Penreath rejoiced, though a smaller world acclaimed the triumphs of the poorer man. In that show-garden, known for miles around, Monk's pride had found a glad home and his energies an outlet which fed them to the full. During his long period of service the Penreaths denied him nothing for the achieving of success, spared no expense, trusted him with large sums of money, treated him as the faithful steward of their interests. Then the dark day dawned that shattered confidence when some agent of the evil one schemed for the downfall of a hard-working man.

As Monk neared the cottage where his happy married

life had been spent his heart beat faster. He began to think the recent events must indeed be all a dream and that he was really back in his old capacity, returning to supper after a day of honest toil. During his waking hours he was always walking the garden in fancy, following the career of each plant and tree known to him so intimately, speculating on their health, gauging just how the weather would affect their various constitutions. Often he unconsciously wounded his wife by watching the sky and discussing the rain or warmth in connection with Rutherwyke's vegetation.

The sight of Mary's home painted snowy white and gleaming like a pearl in the moonlight brought him sharply back to reality. No longer attempting to muffle his tread, he walked boldly to the door and knocked. Mary opened it immediately, still wearing that characteristic plain blue working dress, the rich coloring and graceful lines showing up well against the spotless walls of the simple room. For a moment the change of paint, paper and furniture so surprised Monk that he gazed in speechless astonishment at the altered interior, seeing the old familiar dwelling in fancy just as it looked when Mrs. Monk's household gods made the cottage dear to him.

Neither spoke during the brief pause. Then, with a sudden blinking of dazzled eyes, Monk snatched off his cap and bowed apologetically.

"Excuse me, miss," he muttered, "but there's such a mighty alteration here, it sort of took my breath away for a moment. I was wondering whether I had really come to the right door or if there might perhaps be some mistake."

Mary signed to him to enter as she smilingly replied:

"I was just expecting you. Vines told me you would

probably come up this evening about the place I mentioned. I wrote at once to my friend. You will be glad to hear I have received a telegram, saying he will be very pleased to engage you on my recommendation. His garden is not so large as Rutherwyke, but I dare say you will only be there for a short time. I feel sure, in the end, Mr. Penreath will want you to return to your old quarters. When that day comes, don't be too proud to take your happiness, and forgive."

Monk listened in speechless amazement. He had so little expected to hear good news that he was slow to grasp the full significance of these hopeful words. Of late his mind became so tuned to dull, ceaseless misery and a sense of numbing failure it was difficult to realize the tide could turn. Smarting under injury, his expression grew daily more morose, his features hardened, and he feared to meet the glances of friend or stranger. He grew to think of himself as a leper, who must cry aloud: "Unclean! unclean!"

Mary, with quick intuition, saw that he was overcome, and drawing a chair forward, bade him sit down and rest. He gratefully accepted the offer, for his limbs trembled and he shivered from head to foot. The tired, sunken eyes told of long, sleepless nights, while lines of age seared the rugged face, which until recently bore a youthful appearance.

"Why are you so kind to me?" he gasped breathlessly. "Surely you must think with the rest that I was dismissed from this place for a good reason, that I handled the money too free which the master entrusted to my care. It's only natural that you should. I'm pretty well accustomed to suspicion by now. It was hard at first, but one gets used to anything. I am almost beginning to fancy I am a thief, the name has

been thrown in my face so often lately. Vines alone stood my friend; he spoke of me to you, he'd help me to another place if he could. Still, though I've known him so long, he believes I am guilty. He won't own as much to my face, but I can guess his thought. He changes the subject quickly if I question him. He wouldn't set to work to try and unravel the mystery. That was enough for me, that was the worst stab of all. He should have known better."

The voice addressing Miss Aquila was broken, storm-tossed, hopeless. A mind less quick to understand might have seen in Monk a soured and desperate man, so hardened that all the best traits in his nature were paralyzed by the cruel blows of fate. But Mary looked below the surface, reading in his eyes the story of undeserved shame. An expression of deep pity shone in her sympathetic face, while words of consolation came straight from her heart.

"If I did not think you were innocent," she said, "if I were not convinced that some great mistake has been made, I should hardly contemplate your return to Rutherwyke. I have come to see if I can clear your character—only it will take time, and I must work in my own way. Believe me, I shall do my utmost to reinstate you before the autumn, to open Mr. Penreath's eyes."

Monk looked up wonderingly, his lips trembling, a sudden stiffening of his throat making speech difficult. At last he answered brokenly, with a brave attempt at a smile:

"If anything could help me, miss, it is your kind thought for a stranger and the knowledge that you would try and get me back to a place you so thoroughly deserve to keep yourself. But, unfortunately, you are all in the dark, you don't understand Mr. Penreath; no

more did I, till he turned against me. The Lord knows I would have laid down my life for that man; you see, he can win devotion. I should have sworn he was just, and would never do a mean deed or turn away an old servant almost without a hearing. I felt convinced he would believe me, even though things looked black. I had been in his service so long, and he always studied me —like a real gentleman. But now, miss, even if you leave Rutherwyke, Vines will be made head man. He has worked up for the post, and it isn't likely I would ever get taken on again here. I should not grudge Vines his luck either, for he was always loyal to me, and his wife presses him hard for money. He has a lot to put up with, poor fellow."

Mary winced at the words, and her breath came a little faster as Monk fixed his eyes upon her with the piteous look of a wounded dog. They were the eyes of a soul tottering on the brink of despair. They had looked into the dark places where death and destruction reign.

"Vines may have other things to do," she answered gently, "but we cannot see into the future, and the present alone matters just now. When you go to your new situation you will find the old sorrow much easier to bear. Nothing helps so much as occupation, and because time has hung heavily on your hands, the injustice you suffered appeared to grow every day and every hour till it crushed your spirit and blotted out hope. It has been constantly in your thoughts since you left Rutherwyke. You nursed the memory of this wrong by day and took it to bed with you at night. It colored your dreams and rose with you to darken and embitter the dawn. It crept stealthily from heart to brain and repeated its story a thousand times with in-

creasing vigor—with venom which deadened and poisoned your faculties, piercing the very core and fiber of your being. It absorbed, controlled, mastered your life with its intolerable shadow. You were its slave, bound fast in the toils of a prison house, though you knew God could read your soul and that in His sight you were innocent."

Monk nodded, for the truth of the words drove home. He wondered how she knew. Vines had told him she was beautiful and clever, but he little dreamed her cleverness would take the form of describing the exact working of his mind and the unceasing motion of a brain embittered by tortuous thought.

"You're right, miss," he said, tapping his head. "It settled just here, the smart went on till it crept all over me. I felt I could do most like anything in desperation, and the sin would lie at Mr. Penreath's door. It seems as if a judgment must fall on him, though I never wished him ill. I don't mind telling you, I should have put an end to my misery soon, if this chance had not come along. I had thought of the way—the best way and the surest. But you have made me feel like a coward; you have pointed out a better path; you have saved me from myself. You shall not regret your generous action, lady, or those kind words about the future. The wife dearly loves this house, and it will cheer her wonderfully just to feel there is a possibility of perhaps returning some day. She ain't proud and wouldn't let me refuse the chance if it came along."

Mary opened a drawer and drew out a letter addressed to Monk's future employer. Then she spoke in that gentle, reassuring voice which gave such strength and comfort:

"Yes, keep your wife's spirits up. Remember she

suffers too, and she must be your first consideration. To see you happy will be her best medicine. Go to-morrow, if possible, and see your new home. It is not far by train and your expenses will be paid. Should the interview prove satisfactory, I expect you will begin work in a few days. Take this letter with you and say I asked you to deliver it by hand. Perhaps you would like to read what I have said about you."

She pulled the contents from the envelope, spreading the sheet on the table before Monk's astonished gaze. With fast beating heart he scanned the warm appreciation of his talents, each word revealing that Mary knew exactly the work he had done at Rutherwyke, quite apart from the more mechanical labor of Vines or the unskilled toil of the other men. She must either have questioned the under-gardeners closely or realized by instinct where Monk's special strength lay. After the many recent rebuffs, this praise, well deserved and quite unprejudiced, went to his head like wine. He rose with eyes flaming and a bright color rushing to his temples, spreading its crimson glow over his whole face, alive once more with grateful happiness and untold grief.

"May I," he cried excitedly, "may I show this to the missus? She's that down, it will put fresh heart into her. She has felt a bit sore about your being here, you know what women are, and now she will bless you, miss —bless you to her dying day just as I will, and never forget what you have done for us. I am only afraid it's too good to be true. I hardly dare believe you have set us on our feet again. I am afraid of waking up to find it is all a cruel fancy."

Mary held out her hand. Monk grasped it for a hearty shake.

"There is no dreaming about this," she said pleas-

antly. "It is all very business-like and real. You had better take the telegram also, and certainly show the letter to Mrs. Monk; she will like to see it after the many disappointments. If you want to cheer her, try for a change only to talk of success. Be brave and put all trouble behind you. Turn it out as an intruder, cold shoulder it like your worst enemy. Be sure that right will triumph in the end, if only you will wait patiently and trust in the unseen powers."

Monk moved to the door, eager to return with his good news and Mary watched him with smiling eyes as he passed out into the garden. The night air breathed "the wordless music of the stars." She fancied it played a song of conquest for Monk and that every flower recognized his step. His presence imparted involuntarily a sense of truth and goodness, of hard work done well. Above a group of feathery clouds like angel forms veiled the face of the moon, but the gleaming light could be traced behind, and Mary knew the pale, peerless lamp would soon sail forth unconquered in deathless splendor. The temporary eclipse of the moon was surely like Monk's sorrow, and as Mary pointed to the silver lining the old proverb rose in his mind. It was a silent exchange of thought.

"Good-night," he said. "I'm a plain-spoken man and can't express what I feel, but perhaps you can guess, miss, all the good you've done me. It was an effort to come to the old cottage, and I never expected any benefit from the coming, but I thought I should hurt Vines' feelings if I refused, seeing he meant well. Now I know that you are here, ready to believe in me, to try and clear my character, to get me back if possible; why, it's like a new existence. I had lost hope until this evening,

and when that goes, you can pretty well tell what the world is like and how useless life appears."

He moved away quickly, not daring to hear the kind words she might speak in reply. His eyes were growing moist and he wanted the darkness to hide this sign of weakness in his hour of newly found peace. But Mary, though she only murmured, "good-night," sent with him the influence of her quiet power, her strong, cheering thoughts, the charm of confidence placed in one who had expected to be looked on with suspicion and mistrust.

She listened till the tramp of his feet upon the gravel could no longer be heard. Then she thought of Vines and the phantom steps which dogged him through the day.

"If the truth were known," she said, "Vines is far the saddest of the two."

CHAPTER XIII

WHAT MARY DID

JOSEPHINE had a great desire to see Constance Eastlake, the woman who sent Mary to Rutherwyke, this Mary Aquila who was quickly developing from a mere employee into a personal friend. The daily sittings to Arrow and the interest Josephine naturally took in her husband's new picture combined to draw them into a closer intimacy with the lady gardener than would otherwise have been possible. It was plain to Mrs. Penreath that the new model really helped Arrow in his work, taking extraordinary pains to gratify his most exacting wishes. They owed her a debt of gratitude, yet she never appeared conscious of the help she gave.

During her spare time Mary took up her neglected duties in the garden with enthusiastic zeal. Often she was out at daybreak, and always the skill and judgment of quiet management and unostentatious authority made itself felt. The flower-decked grounds were as much under her care and personal supervision as though the prior claim of the studio had never been forced upon her by an artist eager to immortalize her beauty.

A full account of the Eastlake School of Gardening, illustrated by photographs in a leading weekly journal, made Josephine curious to inspect for herself the successful enterprise, which, until Mary's advent, bade fair

to end in lamentable failure. Trains fitted conveniently, and so Josephine suggested "running over for lunch."

Constance wrote a characteristic reply:

"DEAR JO: It will be simply heavenly to see you again, and I am longing to hear all the gossip you can tell me about my protégée. Sometimes I feel hideously jealous when I think of her with you. I note you state carefully in your letter that you prefer to walk from the station, which means you are in fear and trembling lest you should be met by Max in a racing car. So many of our visitors object to riding in bucket seats, that we have started a highly respectable motor landaulet for station use. It will be there to conduct you soberly to our door, and has never been seen to go out of a crawl, so need not cause you the mildest pang. Max has won several races abroad since last we met. He intends shortly to try and break the world's speed record, and possibly his own neck into the bargain! We had a smash yesterday, but mercifully it was kept out of the papers. I do hate telegrams of inquiry.

"Yours in bits, CON."

Josephine tried to picture the writer of the letter in daily contact with the strangely spiritual Mary. How oddly the two characters must have reacted on each other! Evidently Constance had taken the lady gardener to her heart, lavishing upon her an almost sisterly devotion. Yet Mary never boasted of the friendly treatment she received at the Eastlakes', but rather sought to conceal the affectionate attitude of the duke's daughter toward a humble working woman.

Mrs. Penreath felt, as she journeyed from Abbotts Brooke to the home of her old friend, that Constance at

least would be able to explain certain words and ways which were so puzzling in Mary. Surely she would give some key to the mystery of this fascinating woman. Yet she had said in the past it was above and beyond her comprehension and that Josephine herself must solve the problem.

The landaulet awaiting Mrs. Penreath at the quiet country station appeared anything but slow. Still, it whirled her to the house with less noise and ferocity than its garage companion.

"I could not possibly come and meet you looking such a guy," cried Lady Constance, bounding through the open door, with a handkerchief tied across her face, holding in place a pad of cottonwool fixed over the left eyelid. She wore one arm in a sling and walked with a slight limp. "Oh! yes," seeing Josephine's look of horror, "we did have rather a nasty spill, but it couldn't be avoided. Max and I, being heavily insured, bear charmed lives, though we get no recompense for bruises."

She laughed in the bright, infectious strain that could make even a marred face attractive under bandages. The crimson curls were blowing about right merrily, as if enjoying the joke of Lady Constance's grotesque appearance.

Josephine could not join in the mirth, the sight of her friend's injuries filled her with commiseration.

"My dear, it's awful to think of the risks you run," she said. "I wish you would give up that horrid scorching."

Lady Constance put the first finger of her free hand to a pair of pouting lips.

"Hush—hush!—heresy here!"

She glanced back over her shoulder and away across

the wide hall Max could be seen advancing toward the guest. He had an ugly cut across his cheek and a front tooth conspicuously missing. He swung his long arms freely as he walked, as though proud of their uninjured condition, but his steps betrayed a painful stiffness, more marked than the limp noticeable in his wife.

"I'm dreadfully sorry to see you are both in the wars," began Josephine, but her remark was cut short by a wave of the man's enormous hand and a quick retort:

"The car needs your sympathy far more than we do. Our wounds are but surface affairs. Constance and I are not fussy about ourselves, whereas our poor motor is suffering severe internal injuries, which will cause us a good deal of trouble and expense. It is really most worrying to lay up a car for the sake of a wretched cyclist who was doing his best to get killed. But how is it you are alone? I hoped Arrow would come too. Busy, I suppose, as usual. I am wondering if he has begun a new work since"—here he paused, then added softly—"since Mary went to Rutherwyke."

Josephine glanced with an eye of appreciation at the house, which had been recently redecorated.

There was a touch of orientalism in the color scheme, while not one jarring note spoiled the harmony of the dimly lighted hall. It appeared more suited to a dreamer than that huge, happy, long-limbed man, with his boyish-looking wife, who stood on tiptoe to light her cigarette from one between his lips.

"Arrow would like to have come, but it was impossible," replied Mrs. Penreath. "He is heart and soul in a new picture, madly infatuated with the subject—a very strange and a very sacred one. He remains faithful to his easel through all these glorious summer days.

When the mood is on him he must work, without pausing, until he is bound to stop from sheer exhaustion and hunger. He says, while Nature is lavish to the world, he is most inspired, and so the lovely weather fails to tempt him from his studio."

Max listened with a genuine show of interest. His face was a study as he turned to Josephine.

"Do you remember my prophecy?" he asked.

She wrinkled her brow.

"I don't think I do," she acknowledged. "I have a bad memory. What was it, Max?"

Constance broke in with a sudden flash of excited recollection.

"I know. He said we should be sure to see Mary in next year's Academy. He was convinced she would be made to pose as the Madonna."

The man nodded assent, a triumphant look in his dancing blue eyes.

"Arrow isn't blind," he murmured slyly. "With a face like that on the premises, no artist could resist turning the lady gardener into a model. I longed to be able to paint when she was here, instead I had to content myself with some secret snapshots, but unfortunately the photographs never developed. Perhaps Mary ill-wished the camera, only one knows she would be too kind hearted to do so."

Mrs. Penreath threw off her dust cloak in the hall. Already lunch was announced. Very slender and pretty she looked in her light summer gown, a delicate flush tinting the face—fair and fragile as a lily. Her appearance of youth was the result of ceaseless care and many hours of rest. She appeared hardly older than Lady Constance, who was fifteen years her junior. Now the questioning eyes looked at Max with quiet scrutiny.

"I am afraid Arrow would not like me to mention the subject of his new picture," declared Josephine, "but I don't suppose I am violating confidence by confessing that Mary is sitting to him. She definitely refused at first and I hardly expected her to give way, but somehow Arrow, who is very plausible, gained his point in the end. I have never known his powers of persuasion to fail."

Max burst into a hearty laugh, which he did not try to restrain.

"Bravo!" he cried. "I respect Arrow for his perseverance, and am really glad to know that wonderful face will be seen of men. If Mary is the most retiring human being, she cannot prevent the gaping crowd feasting their eyes on your husband's work. It is a great achievement on Arrow's part. Give him my heartiest congratulations."

Constance, who was feeding herself with a fork and looking rather dubiously at the chopped-up pieces of food, smiled approval.

"I am glad you told us, Josephine," she said in a lowered voice. "After lunch I want to have a talk with you about Mary."

Max listened with a quizzical expression. It always amused him to notice how serious Constance became when she spoke of Mary Aquila.

"You know"—turning to Josephine—"that is a subject my wife refuses to discuss before me; she thinks I treat it with too much levity. I assure you, when Mary was here, Con positively worshiped the ground she trod on. I do believe it was pain and grief to the poor woman, since by some strange chance she possessed an amazingly humble nature. I always tell Con that Mary left because she had no wish to be adored."

Lady Constance listened with a petulant shrug of her shoulders, which so inconvenienced the injured arm a little cry of pain ensued.

"Oh! bother," she said. "I cannot move without hurting myself. But I must say, if I were fond of Mary, all the girls in the gardening school followed my example. Even now they talk of her constantly, hardly a day passes but I hear her name. They preserve mementoes of her, almost as if they were sacred relics. One of our youngest pupils has a small tree in a pot which she declares will never die. Mary gave it to her last Christmas, and Christmas was a most mysterious time."

Constance paused, for just at that moment she succeeded in pinning down a slippery mushroom which had ruthlessly evaded her fork. Now she raised the dainty morsel to her lips, won by painstaking effort, enjoying the sweets of victory.

"Why mysterious?" asked Josephine.

Her voice sounded natural enough, but despite the warm day a chill ran down her spine, like cold water to the heat-glow of her flesh.

"Mary vanished and no one knew where," replied Lady Constance as she swallowed the mushroom and started again on her arduous task of single-handed manipulation. "Early in the morning a message came that Miss Aquila was not to be found. We were giving a big dinner to the students, quite a festive affair. Afterward they played games and sang Christmas carols. Later on a note arrived from Mary, simply stating she was sorry she could not be with them. The rest was kept a profound secret. Nobody saw her either go or return, and she never gave the slightest hint of her movements. Oddly enough, though all the girls were

talking about her absence unceasingly throughout the day, not one dared question her the following morning. They said 'something in her face stopped them.' "

Josephine bent forward, eagerly drinking in the words.

"But didn't you ask?" she queried. "I am sure I should have found out directly."

Constance shook her head.

"I can't bear to seem curious, and it was no business of mine. I felt that Mary would have told me herself, had she wished me to know."

Max glanced across at his wife, his eyebrows slightly raised and his features touched by glints of humor.

"Perhaps," he said, "something in her face stopped you too."

There was a pause. Josephine's eyes were cast down. She sipped her wine a little nervously. Then she murmured with a shrug of impatient shoulders:

"Where do you think she went, Con?"

The words came petulantly, for since her arrival a fresh feeling of dread tinged her thoughts. She wished Constance would dispel, instead of fostering, all the uncanny and baffling illusions which hovered round Mary's personality.

"I could not say. I would not dare to guess. Ask Max. He has many explanations."

Josephine obeyed. She turned to her host and fixed her eyes upon him pleadingly.

"Please don't joke about it," she said, "but do tell me. Wasn't it rather peculiar of her to go away at such a time without a word of warning? You see, she has no relations apparently. She says she is quite alone in the world and that all her people died long ago. She gives no information about herself, and yet we take her to our

hearts; we can't shut her out, even though we disapprove of our own weakness. She forces good fellowship, she compels trust, she disarms suspicion. You are a man of the world. What do you think of Mary Aquila?"

Max no longer smiled, he was quite serious now. Mrs. Penreath asked his opinion in a voice that revealed a note of anxiety, and he was courteous enough to respect her attitude.

"If you really want my opinion about her so-called mysterious disappearance last Christmas, I see nothing so very strange in Mary's sudden absence. Probably she has been in your service long enough for you to discover she is exceedingly kind to the poor. Doubtless somebody was in trouble, and she went to bind up a broken spirit or nurse a sick child. Her subsequent silence would rise from humility, hiding her light under a bushel, you know. The event was magnified by imaginative people who honestly believed that some deep motive lay behind a very ordinary occurrence."

Josephine breathed more freely. Max Eastlake's words of sound common sense created a feeling of security that was peculiarly refreshing to the highly strung woman. The very muscle and build of his imposing figure made her feel comfortably near to earth and agreeably separated from ghostly fears.

"I expect you are right," she murmured, "and I must say if the grounds here owe much to Mary, she is indeed a splendid gardener. I suppose you have turned out quite a number of skilled pupils from the school. How delightful to feel you are doing some good in the world with your money, helping struggling girls to obtain a livelihood in these over-crowded days of unemployment."

Her eyes flashed a look of appreciation through the open French window, which afforded a fine view of the

Eastlake grounds, a perfect paradise of care and cultivation.

"Mary brought us our first success," said Constance, "the luck changed when she came. I must show you the Tudor garden, which is full of most glorious roses grown on pillars. Mary was responsible, too, for 'the scented garden,' a place of such delicious fragrance that you never want to leave it. She planted all my special favorites there—heliotrope, verbena, mignonette, honeysuckle, white and purple clematis and arches of crimson ramblers. Underfoot there is the really old red-brick pavement, which is positively fascinating. We will have our coffee on the lawn by the sundial and then take a long walk round."

Josephine was not sorry when Constance made the move to comfortable seats in the garden of varied hues, only her heart sank somewhat when her hostess informed her she would send for the baby.

"I want you to see Babs," she said. "I know you are fond of children."

Josephine tried to smile, but the memory of a small atom of humanity, with vacant eyes and gaping lips, made the smile one of pain rather than pleasure. In early days it had been well known the Eastlakes refused to see that their child was mentally deficient.

"Of course," Constance continued, lighting another cigarette as she held her well-filled case between her knees, "I don't pretend to understand babies. I know much more about motors, but I really should value your opinion of Babs."

Josephine felt nonplussed. What could she say? To praise became so difficult when forced and unreal, to speak the truth too cruel where ignorance was bliss.

"It is so long since my boy was a baby," she stammered. "I fear I am a very poor judge."

Constance paid little heed to the words, which she took as an expression of modesty from one who possibly preferred to disown domestic virtues.

Even as Josephine spoke a white-clad nurse, leading a little toddler by the hand, advanced across the lawn.

"See how firmly the child walks," said Constance, an unexpected note of excitement in her voice. "At one time she could not take two straight steps and at an age when others run about and play."

She held out her hand to the mite in a big sun-bonnet. For a moment Josephine dared not look beneath the frilled shade, then, determined to voice a host of society lies, she turned with the conventional "What a dear little——"

But before the sentence finished, Babs' bonnet slipped back and she raised her face to Mrs. Penreath.

The words died suddenly on Josephine's tongue from sheer astonishment. A pair of bright eyes, with a twinkle in them like Max in his moments of mirth, peeped up with rare intelligence. The baby mouth smiled a welcome and a small hand patted her knee, with the love children feel instinctively for light, attractive clothes.

"Is—is this Babs?" she gasped, hardly recognizing the features in their new changed mood.

Constance was watching her friend closely.

"Why, yes," she replied. "I believe you would not have known her. Do you—do you think she has improved?"

Josephine gathered the little one on her knee, unable to conceal her joyful relief.

"I never saw a child so altered," she declared candidly. "Why is she so much brighter and stronger?"

Constance remained silent for a moment. She looked toward the dining-room windows to make sure Max was not approaching. Then she added with an effort at appearing natural:

"Let me see, when did she change nurse? You and I both remarked on the improvement at the same time. Ah! I remember, it was soon after Miss Aquila came to the garden school. I brought her up one day to the nursery, and she seemed unhappy about Babs. She said the child wanted rousing, and asked if she might come and play with her sometimes. Once or twice she took her out alone, you were not very well just then. From that hour Babs began to notice things, and to talk a little, and to get fonder of me. We used to say it was Miss Aquila's influence, didn't we, nurse?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Josephine listened with parted lips and eyes of wonder as she viewed the happy expression of a child no longer caught in the spell of some strange brain trouble.

Constance rose and kissed the rosy face.

"Run away, Babs," she said, making a sign to the nurse. "You shall come back later, when I am alone."

Josephine did not ask for her to stay, she only wanted to be left with Constance.

As the strong child-limbs trotted off across the grass Mrs. Penreath clasped her hands and met the mother's searching look fixed upon her questioningly. At last Lady Constance spoke in an awed whisper:

"Jo, watch her as she runs—you see, you see. Ah! I know you thought I was blind before, but I closed my eyes wilfully; I would not accept the truth. I said, 'It cannot, cannot be. My child different to others—im-

possible!' I rebelled against the thought. I put it from me fiercely. I never mentioned it even to my husband. Men are less observant. But though I tried to seem indifferent, though I laughed in the face of the world, the sharp pang was knocking at my heart all the time. I avoided the nursery, because Babs either did not notice me at all or turned away and cried. The vacant look in her eyes would fill me with such terror and despair that sometimes I almost feared for my own reason. I dare say, speaking of it to no one made the sorrow worse. I hoped Max did not see. I kept him as much as possible from the child; I did not want him to suffer as I suffered."

Lady Constance paused, as if the painful memory of the past rose before her and stifled speech. She put her hand to her throat, drawing a deep breath.

"And then?" queried Josephine, leaning forward. Her look of interest encouraged the mother to continue.

"And then Mary came. I was puzzled at first, a little suspicious perhaps of her beauty and very quiet manner. I thought she could not possibly be as good as she appeared. I even hinted to Max that the new arrival might prove unsatisfactory, since quiet people are sometimes deceptive. He said men were quicker at telling these things than women, and assured me, as a judge of character, that Mary was quite as saintly as she appeared. He spoke so strongly on this point I wondered if he tried to draw her out by a little flattery, only to find how utterly unworldly and simple she was."

Josephine gave an almost inaudible sigh of quiet satisfaction. Perhaps she pictured Mary at that moment in the studio with Arrow, his daily companion of long working hours, in a solitude of two. She fancied, since the sittings commenced, she could trace a subtle

change in the artist's character. He spoke more kindly of his numerous enemies, who, grudging him fame, did all in their power to present him to the public in a wrong light. Once or twice lately she had mentioned Monk, and Arrow's words betrayed more sympathy than censure. His nerves, too, appeared quieted; he was less erratic and more considerate to Josephine.

"I suppose, after your husband's verdict, you began to feel greater confidence in Mary," Mrs. Penreath murmured casually.

Constance drew the low garden chair nearer.

"I should not have relied upon Max," she retorted, smiling, "because if Mary had really been deceiving us, he was the last person, after all, to whom she would have revealed her frivolous side. But I just quietly watched, and in a very few days I absolutely made up my mind that a wonderful character was in our midst. I not only observed her work—the ceaseless energy, the untiring devotion, the infection of high-souled endeavor—I saw how she drew together the missing threads and wove them into a strong web of lasting fabric. I noticed her example spreading like fire in a wind. Girls we despaired of became models of virtue under Mary's rule, willing reformation appeared on all sides, and this new enthusiasm, this fresh life, evident in every task, made for refreshing happiness. Every face smiled. When I went round the grounds and houses I found the old grumblers had mysteriously vanished and were replaced by pleasant people, eager to excel, and always Mary's name was on their lips, to tell what she said, what she advised, what she did. Still I was unconvinced. I feared the improvement would not last, since anything marvelous, unexpected and a little eerie takes a long time to knock its way into my hard head! Perhaps

Mary realized this, for suddenly she turned her attention to me."

As Constance uttered these words, her unbandaged eye grew, if possible, more scintillating and brilliantly attractive, with the sparkle of sunlight on water and just the suspicion of a tear in its quivering depths.

Josephine forgot her surroundings, so intent was she upon her friend's words. She did not see Max emerge from the dining-room, cast a glance at the two chattering women and move away toward the garage.

"Yes. Go on, go on."

The words were spoken impatiently. Constance's habit of pausing irked her listener.

"Well, when Mary's attention is turned to you, it makes rather a startling experience and is one you will probably never encounter in your calm, even life. I fancy she only gives the full benefit to those who are really troubled. I had succeeded in deceiving the ordinary passer-by, I could even throw dust in the eyes of my husband (and they ought to be used to dust when you think of the racing car!), but it took more than my mother-wit to hide my misery from Mary Aquila. She asked me suddenly, in one of the conservatories, whether she might see my little girl? I suppose I hesitated and grew red. I never let nurse bring Babs at that time to the gardening school. I did not want the students to know the child by sight. I tried to put off the question by some feeble excuse, and then Mary told me in quite simple words that she knew all my trouble. She unfolded the hidden sorrows of my heart. She told me my thoughts, pangs, fears. By some strange power her intuition guided her aright. Possibly she read my mind at the moment, probably she had divined its secrets long since. It seemed to me afterward that her spirituality

must have given her this strange insight. She lived above the flesh in some utterly pure atmosphere of her own making, drawing it round her like a veil, to use as a protection against all that was evil."

Josephine sat very upright now, her eyes fixed upon Constance with redoubled intensity.

"How did Mary know? Can you tell me that?"

She spoke uneasily, with an inborn horror of anything approaching a thought-reader or clairvoyant. In an earlier age she would have been the first to burn the priestesses of witchcraft.

"I dare say rumor reached her," replied Lady Constance, seeing Josephine's consternation, "or perhaps she put two and two together. I may, after all, be very transparent in my attempted deceptions. But now I look back, it strikes me as likely that she found out about Babs before she came to the school. She spoke as though my sorrow had brought her there. Of course I was so taken off my guard, I owned up to everything, all my bitterness of heart, my shame, rebellion and the pride which kept me dumb. In the past pity was the very last thing I felt that I could bear. We were all as a family rather too proud, and Mary made me see this. She showed me myself in quite a new and unexpected light. I can't tell you what she said or what she did, but her influence was so wonderfully soothing that I felt almost happy after my first outburst, though I had little hope then of ever seeing Babs better. I simply unburdened my soul to that woman, and all the time some voice within kept saying the word 'Holy!' We went together to the child's play-room, and Babs ran to Mary, as if she had known her all her life. I was surprised and perhaps a little jealous at first, but that feeling soon passed off when I saw the good effect she

had on my poor little daughter. The startling change did not happen at once—it took time—but nevertheless I called it a miracle, a veritable miracle. When I said this to Mary she was indignant, but I shall always think so. How can I think otherwise? You have only to look for yourself; you have only to see Babs. Every spare moment was given to the child. Once when she had a feverish cold, Mary came and sat by her cot all night. She taught Babs to love me; she made her notice and observe. She showed her how to play as other children play; she woke some dormant sense; she dispelled a heavy cloud. During that critical time when Mary was working the spell, devoting all her energies to the case at hand, I was ignored. She had no word for me; she was bound up in Babs. I watched as one apart. I felt terribly excited. I saw the dawning intelligence; nurse saw it too, and Mary's ways filled her with awe. At last an unmistakable success crowned each fresh effort. The child lost her hazy look; she began to laugh and answer intelligently, as her face grew rosy and responsive. Then I could contain myself no longer. I simply rushed to Mary in such a wild fit of gratitude that Max was not far from the mark when he said I worshiped her. I offered her figuratively the half of my kingdom. I entreated her never to leave us, to be my adopted sister, to live in our house and share my income, to consider herself as one of the family for life. I hated the idea of her going away from Babs. She read my thoughts, assuring me the child would improve from year to year, planting in my mind the conviction that all must be well. As to my offer, she paid little or no heed to it; she scarcely seemed to hear what I said. This woman, working for her bread, barely thanked me for my pressing invitation, from the mere fact that it was never

considered for a moment. She just smiled away the words and shortly afterward broke to me gently the chilling fact that she must leave. I rather fancy she never stays long in one place. Perhaps she knows the power of her influence and feels compelled to seek fresh pastures that it may spread and grow. She spoke of going just as I heard of your trouble with Monk. I said to Max, if we must lose her, I should like her to go to my old friends, that they might benefit. I longed to tell you this story of Babs when last we were at Rutherwyke, but I thought you must see the child first and know Mary before you could understand or believe my story."

Constance, whose eyes had been fixed upon the far-away nursery windows, now turned to Josephine to see the effect of her narrative. Even as she did so a little cry of horror escaped her, for Josephine's head fell back, her lips became blue, her fingers twitched and she was apparently fighting for breath. Feebly she gasped the words, "Smelling salts," and then fell sideways, stiff, nerveless and pale as death.

Constance forgot her wounded arm as she caught the unconscious body until a sudden sharp pain reminded her that she had dragged it from the sling.

"Max!" she cried loudly, "Max, come and help me. Josephine has fainted."

In the distance she could see her husband walking toward the house. Suddenly he heard her calling and started running, his wide steps covering the intervening space with the speed of a long-limbed greyhound. In a moment he had reached the two women, and waving Constance aside, picked Josephine up as if she had been a baby and carried her into the house.

CHAPTER XIV

"WHY NOT?"

"WHAT can you expect if you will make your visitors sit in the full heat and glare by that sundial?" Max was saying to Constance as Josephine stirred and looked dizzily round the cool drawing-room.

"I do believe I fainted," murmured the weak voice of the sufferer as the realization of life returned.

"I really do believe you did," replied Constance, placing some liquid to her lips. "Drink this, dear. There! your color is coming back already and you will be all right in a minute. I am so used to sitting in the sun that I forget other people cannot stand it in the same way. I shall know in the future that sun-baths may have disastrous effects."

Josephine closed her eyes again, her collar was unfastened and her forehead wet with the water they had sprinkled on her face. She felt instinctively for a handkerchief in which her powder puff was secreted.

"Was it the sun, do you think?" she asked, trying to collect her thoughts. "I have only fainted once before in my life, a long time ago, when I was very frightened. I had to sleep in a haunted room and a girl friend played a trick on me. I thought I saw a ghost and fell down like a stone."

Constance drew a chair to the couch and whispered:

"Don't talk for a few minutes, just keep quiet till you are quite yourself again."

She made a sign to Max to go away. His services were no longer required and he crept from the room on tiptoe.

Josephine watched him vanish through the door, then looked up wonderingly at Constance.

"I can't imagine how it happened," she said apologetically, ignoring the advice just given and speaking her thoughts aloud. "I am so sorry to cause all this trouble. We were talking of something, Con. What was it? I wish I could remember."

A tender hand stroked Josephine's brow, Constance's one free hand, for the other had been eased back by Max into the sling, with sundry suppressed groans from an injured motorist.

"Never mind, I will tell you later."

Josephine sat up with an effort.

"I must know," she said. "I must know now. It was about—about——"

The really troubled look on her face induced Constance to add:

"About Mary."

Josephine fell back with a little nod of recollection, and her breathing became faster than before.

"Of course, how stupid of me; it all flashes back. Didn't you say you felt I must know Mary before I could understand?"

Constance fanned the prostrate figure as she replied:

"Yes, I think I said that."

The air revived Josephine, and she turned a pair of grateful eyes on her hostess.

"Thank you, dear. Don't trouble to fan me any more. I am much better. Of course, knowing Mary, I understood only too well all you told me. I pictured every scene to the life, and then suddenly I felt as if the

garden and everything tangible slipped from me. I heard your voice miles away, and could no longer see you. I wanted to cry out, but I couldn't speak; I thought I was stifling in a dense fog. Oh! it was a horrible sensation! I wonder if death is like that."

Josephine lay in a refreshing draft between the open door and window. Every moment the feeling of returning strength made it hard to realize she had so recently lost consciousness.

"Do you know," she whispered in a sudden burst of confidence, "I am a terrible coward and I confess I do sometimes feel a little frightened of Mary. All you told me was so uncanny that it bore out certain ideas which possessed me at Rutherwyke, ideas I have owned to no one but Arrow. Don't ask me what they are, for I should not like to appear utterly ridiculous in your eyes. But Mary is certainly mysterious and wonderful. I cannot accept her as just the ordinary human being; that would be impossible. I fancy there is something unreal about her, and the very thought makes my flesh creep and takes my breath away. No one else appears to feel this, and Arrow says I am hypersensitive, nervy and hysterical. If he knew I fainted to-day when you were telling me about Mary, he would say—well—he would say I had worked myself up into a state of terror and collapsed for no earthly reason. There he would be right. If a reason could be found it would not be of earth."

Constance looked piteously at her friend. She could not understand anybody being frightened of Mary, that sweet woman with the kind eyes, tranquil manner and low, soothing voice. Certainly there must be something very wrong with Josephine.

"Perhaps, dear, you ought to go away for a change,"

she said soothingly. "I often think you stay too long at Rutherwyke. At one time you were always visiting or entertaining. Now you seem to live so much to yourself, and I don't think it is good for you. One is apt to become too imaginative."

Josephine moved from the sofa and began arranging her disheveled hair in front of a hanging mirror.

"Not to myself," she answered with a shake of her head. "Oh! no, I do not live to myself, Constance. I am absolutely wrapped up in Arrow and his career. If I am a hermit, he has made me one. People staying in the house disturb him. When tired from a long day's painting, he finds it very fatiguing to be obliged to talk at meals. I understand him and can read his face as some prophets read the weather. It is an open book to me. I am sure many think us selfish, but Arrow says it is such a comfort to feel he has really a home, a quiet place of refuge, and not a hotel kept for the benefit of relations and friends in search of amusement. I bow to genius and am content to let Rutherwyke remain the quiet retreat of a great worker."

Lady Constance possessed such a restless nature and was so accustomed to coming and going that she found this point of view difficult to grasp. For her life was a series of house-parties and motoring tours in all four continents. Months and years whirled by in the perpetual motion of rapid engagements. She could hardly picture existence without frequent journeys abroad or the weekly "week end" of social intercourse. Her horizon became limited by bridge parties, tennis tournaments, dances, dinners and, above all, the exciting motor contests in which Max freely indulged. She remembered Josephine, in her earlier married years, as the leader of a social set in which celebrities abounded, the giver of

lavish entertainments, notable for their originality. At her house men of letters, artists, leading politicians and famous beauties were drawn together by the magnetism and charm of the Penreath hospitality. At that time both Arrow and Josephine exerted all their powers of attraction, scheming to make each entertainment more dazzling than the last. Then the climber was mounting the ladder, seeking the golden apple of success with a feverish lust for fame. The men and women he entertained were the men and womn who could help him on in his career. The big people of the fashionable world must be made familiar with the name of Arrow Penreath, and every move was arranged with the subtle calculation of one who meant to be received and known. Few guessed how the popular artist longed to shut out this great throng of admirers, to refuse even the invitations of royalty, and be alone, unhampered, with his art as sole companion. But at last release came, and when complete triumph was assured, when every tongue sang his praises, and the world acknowledged him the greatest master of his day, then he laughingly turned his back on the crowd. Those who desired to fête him were not even favored by an answer to their invitations. The warmest congratulations were thrust unread into the waste-paper basket. He only wanted to escape from the obligations of a large acquaintance. The game had been played and won. No need to push and clamor now, the public was his friend, that vast, indescribable voice of many waters which acclaimed and sang soothing songs of victory—peans of adulation untaxed by separate personalities. The slavery was over, the striving finished. Henceforth the world waited for him; he did not wait for the world.

Josephine knew all this, though she dared breathe

none of it to Constance, knew and regretted the days of endeavor, remembering their seductive sweetness. Now there was nothing left for her but to sit in the shadow of his greatness. The stimulating fight was over and her charm of manner, her good looks, her tact were of no further help to Arrow. Only lately a new thought came with a thrill of pleasure, fresh fields of energy spread tempting nets before her eyes, in which she might once more catch her prey for another loved one.

Constance saw the strange, yearning expression in Mrs. Penreath's eyes, saw them gradually brightening with some unspoken excitement, born of the thoughts now flitting through her brain. The younger woman knew that silence could not last for long and waited patiently for Josephine to speak.

"Of course," said the voice, which had recovered its usual strength, "there is Oliver to be considered. We can hardly believe he is grown up yet, but once a young man embarks on social life, if his parents remain hermits, they not only lose their hold upon his affections, but they lose his presence altogether. Perhaps it would be too much to expect Arrow to make any difference in his habits, but I personally have every intention of helping and not hindering my boy. He shall bring his friends to Rutherwyke and enjoy life to the full. You will laugh when I tell you that though I try to keep young by every imaginable device, my dearest wish is to be a grandmother."

Constance smiled approval and would have clapped her hands but for the confining influence of the sling.

"Splendid!" she cried. "I have quite worried over your long eclipse, thinking so often of the past, when you were the gayest of the gay, the most popular hostess in London. Now the old days may revive, for a

raison d'être is offered, stands at your very door in the person of a handsome and talented son on the threshold of life. I remember Arrow telling Max of Oliver's cleverness more than a year ago. He said the boy was really brilliant and should make a wonderful speaker, since he suffered from none of youth's usual shyness. Max jokingly declared Arrow saw a future prime minister in Oliver. But many a jest becomes truth, and this may prove a case of the 'true word spoken.' "

Josephine shrugged her shoulders with a good-natured shake of her head.

Much as she admired her son, she tried not to appear infatuated, an effort produced by a natural shrinking from ridicule.

"Of course," she said, "it is very difficult to judge of boys until they suddenly develop into men. Girls reveal far earlier their character and inclinations. Oliver was always good at games, yet he loved reading and showed himself a deep thinker at a very early age. He has certainly a rather ingratiating manner, which is a great help to a man of the world, and it will not be my fault if, in a short time, he does not know his world very well."

Constance assented, still with a little twinkle in her eye which suggested mischief.

"Certainly he could not have a better guide, counselor and friend than the fair Josephine, with her subtle discernment and woman's intuition to guide his early steps. Oliver was wise in his selection of a mother!"

The subject effectually dispelled Mrs. Penreath's recent depression. Though she leaned back a little languidly on the cushions, her eyes were alight with burning interest, and as she forgot their talk of Mary her spirits revived, released from that overwhelming shadow of fear and mystery.

"I have always believed," she continued, "that young minds should be trained early in good taste and judgment. If at eighteen (a truly impressionable age) the son is thrown by his parents with the right sort of people his choice of friends becomes naturally educated and refined. I shall do all in my power to dispel the idea that respectability must be linked to ugliness, boredom and dowdy dressing. He shall be thrown with the best the world can give, and if he has a scrap of gratitude in his composition, he will bless the mother who spreads before him a dazzling feast which he may legitimately devour. I could never understand the allurements of forbidden fruit, and in this Arrow agrees with me. Concealment, hypocrisy, lying must prove irksome as well as demoralizing, and they take up too much time in these days of hurried living. Vice is very boring, if viewed in a spirit of emancipation and enlightenment."

Constance still listened with an air of approval. To each philosophical sentence uttered by Josephine she murmured a half-inaudible assent.

"I can see you will make an extremely desirable mamma; I may say a really model parent of the up-to-date school. I should like to offer you my help, only you hardly need it, I fancy. Still I must say one or two particularly sparkling gems in the matrimonial market flashed before my mental vision as you described your future plans. I allude to débutantes who might require a year or two of unfettered freedom before settling down, but this would probably suit the youthful Oliver. I have frequently noticed how men go back to an early love after quite a prolonged bachelorhood, while the girl, having possibly experienced some unsatisfactory affairs, hails her original admirer as an old and trusted

friend. They compare notes and fall into each other's arms. A happy youth is a great safeguard to age."

Josephine felt the truth of the words; it was not unlike a brief *résumé* of her own girlhood.

"Of course," she said, "I should love you to help me, Constance, in my efforts to wake up Rutherwyke. No one could understand the position better than yourself. Picture a woman trying to revive the enthusiasms of youth for the sake of the boy she loves. See her influencing his destiny without ever betraying her object. Glory with her if she succeeds or should she fail pity her from the bottom of your heart, for what could be more bitter than to connect an only son and his mother with that lamentable word—failure?"

Constance put one hand to her forehead, as if to force the ideas floating about in her brain.

"Wait a minute," she murmured, "I am just trying to think of the special plums in the big fat social pudding prepared to tempt Oliver with its sweetened mass. Has he, as yet, any particular preference or is he in the puppy stage of gobbling up everything?"

Josephine reflected a moment, as her eyes sought involuntarily for a clock, with the vague remembrance that sooner or later she must catch a train to Abbotts Brooke.

"I fancy he admires dark women at present."

Constance gave a little chuckle.

"Then he will probably marry an albino. No harm, however, in trying him with a young, rich-complexioned Castilian of my acquaintance, who comes into a big fortune on her twenty-first birthday. She is only just 'out,' and simply mad about art. She would probably think a son of Arrow's a little god on earth. I gave her one of your husband's autographs the last time we met. If

I remember rightly, she kissed it and capped her action by the unromantic remark that the paper smelled stale. Anyway, she gave it the place of honor in a royal autograph book. I should like to see Oliver united to this dark, supple daughter of Spain. Her mother lives in Paris and is in the best Spanish society there. The girl often comes over to stay with us; she is immensely admired."

Constance was too absorbed by the thought of her dark-eyed friend to notice Josephine's anxious expression. The speaker pictured a graceful form and a face glowing with youth, in which deeply set, dark eyes laughed out upon the world, while the listener had visions of stilettos and the passionate love which a breath of suspicion could turn to passionate hate.

"I think," said Josephine quietly, "I should prefer him to marry an English girl. But surely it must be getting late, and I ought to be starting for my train."

Constance shook her head.

"I don't think you are quite up to traveling before to-morrow," she declared. "I am having your room prepared and sending Arrow a wire to say we have persuaded you to stay the night. Then, in the morning, when you are quite yourself again, I will take you round the school of gardening and afterward you can go back in the cool of the evening. I will lend you everything and we shall love to keep you a little longer."

For a moment Josephine appeared riveted to her chair, then she sprang to her feet with such keen resolve written in every line of her face that Constance hardly recognized her as the same woman who a moment since smilingly discussed Oliver's future.

"It would be impossible for me to stay," she replied decidedly, and her expression betrayed a painful picture

of mental distress. "I could not leave Arrow alone. He would be terribly nervous about me, and it is very bad to upset him when he is working so hard."

Constance tried to soothe her with a quick rejoinder:

"Oh! of course we will not say you have been ill. Time enough to explain when you return, and he sees for himself there is nothing to be alarmed at. We can easily make some other excuse in the telegram."

With hurried fingers Josephine adjusted her veil. Every eager movement betrayed she had no intention of remaining. She thrust her hatpins through fine straw and soft, wavy hair with a fierce onslaught of a will determined to venture forth, alive or dead, whatever Constance's persuasive voice might say to the contrary. As the easy-going woman watched these quick preparations for departure she found Josephine a complete enigma. Her very fingers appeared to perform their task of adornment with the touch of mechanism, as though some artificial force drove the spirit within to unnatural rebellion against a hidden foe.

"I suppose, then, I cannot induce you to be reasonable," sighed Constance. "But I really do think it is very rash to travel back after that bad faint."

In her heart the speaker was saying:

"Surely you are not jealous of Mary? It could not possibly be that. Such an idea is too absurd, quite unworthy of Josephine."

She longed to speak the thought aloud, but refrained. Such words would have appeared sacrilegious to one who so recently bestowed upon Mary the sacred essence of worship, inspired by wonder, gratitude and a realization of the purity and holiness of spiritual influence.

Josephine threw off all semblance of illness and smiled suddenly upon Constance with a sense of complete mas-

tery over self. If the smile were artificial, it held at least some strong inward conviction, revealing mental resolve which triumphed over physical weakness. Yet the note of confidence which had existed between these two friends throughout the day seemed to have broken mysteriously. They were far apart now, mere acquaintances in thought and word. Involuntarily Josephine steeled her mind against inquisitive suggestions, which Constance had no intention of making. As if fearful lest she should meet with unexpected delay, the guest manifested a nervous desire to leave. Divining this, Constance gave orders for the landaulet to be early at the door. After a hurried cup of tea, Mrs. Penreath departed, with renewed apologies for her illness, wearing an undisguised expression of relief that the moment had come to say good-bye."

"It is very odd," declared Constance as she watched her friend drive away, "but when I tried to persuade Josephine to stay the night, she threw herself into a perfect frenzy of excitement and dread. She never had another easy moment until she got out of the house. I wonder what it all means? She evidently has something on her mind."

Max listened to his wife's words and shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"Can't you guess? It is all very clear to me. In her heart she does not like Mary Aquila sitting to her husband for this new picture. Mary is different, remember, to a professional model, who just comes for a stated time. She is living on the estate. At present she is a fixture, and considering her beauty, one cannot be altogether surprised at Mrs. Penreath's agitation."

Constance thought for a moment in silence, wrinkling

her brow under the bandage and gazing down the drive at the vanishing car.

"I wonder!" she murmured at last. "Poor Josephine!"

The last two words were uttered in sympathy for one who could live near Mary and so misunderstand her peerless nature.

"Why," added Constance after a brief pause given to reflection, "thinking ill of Mary seems to me like looking into a clear brook and imagining that its crystal brightness is thick with mud and foul matter. Besides, after what I told her in the garden——"

Here the speaker checked herself, but Max noticed the sudden rising of her color and the look of veiled confusion.

"What did you tell her?" he asked.

Perhaps he knew in his heart that his wife would not give the true answer. She was quick in her endeavor to mislead him.

"Oh! about the change which crept over the school almost immediately on Mary's arrival. I tried to describe her influence over the girls, but evidently I failed to impress Josephine, if you have guessed rightly."

Constance still looked down on the ground. She began digging the point of her walking-stick in the gravel and drawing aimless patterns.

"Nothing more?" persisted Max. "You told her nothing more?"

His tone was strangely searching, as if he suspected something.

His wife prevaricated.

"What more could I tell? I am sure I do not remember all we said. We were talking such a long time, and

then when she fainted it put the conversation entirely out of my thoughts."

The two sauntered down the drive together, turning in the direction of the Tudor garden.

"Did Mrs. Penreath see Babs?" asked the man.

Constance nodded, trying to make the movement as casual as possible, then murmured in an offhand tone:

"Yes, Josephine saw Babs."

Max quickened his steps, raising his head as if to drink in the warm air with animal satisfaction. He loved the sun and the wind. All the year round his skin was burned a deep tan. He was the picture of a thorough outdoor man, a lover of country life and freedom.

"I suppose she noticed the change," he said at last.

Constance started. This was her husband's first allusion to the improvement in their child. The wife still avoided his eyes and inwardly asked herself, "Can he know? Has he guessed? Did he ever see?"

Then she answered with a little catch in her voice:

"Josephine certainly thought Babs looked much brighter and better."

As she spoke Constance opened her well-stocked cigarette case, contemplated its contents and closed it again with a sigh. Possibly the lack of one arm made the simple act of lighting up tiresome to contemplate. Max fumbled for his matches as if to render assistance, then changed his mind and turned suddenly to the slim figure at his side. He gazed a moment at the cloud of red curls, which gave her such a peculiarly boyish appearance. There was a waywardness about them that suggested character, free, untamed, eager for full, eventful life. Her face, too, indicated a happy-go-lucky nature, given to dodging misfortune, even when it stood at her very door, refusing the intruder admit-

tance, though he beat against the portals of her heart. Max wondered what was passing in her mind.

"Do you remember the day Mary stopped us as we were starting to Rutherwyke?" he said. "You know she warned me to be careful of the children. She spoke in such a tone of authority, she quite took your breath away. I believe you thought I should be very angry."

Constance recalled the incident only too well.

"Yes, I can see her face as if it had been yesterday. I was astonished you accepted her advice so calmly. If any one else, especially in her position, had dared to suggest such a thing, I can just picture how furious it would have made you."

They were nearing the garden of roses, their favorite spot, and Constance moved to a quaint carved seat in the scented bower of blossom. Some of the pale blush leaves had fallen on the path of ancient red brick, and, lying there in sweet abandonment, gave just an extra touch of poetry to the scene.

"I might, as you say," replied Max, "have lost my temper with any one else, but I knew, just as well as you knew, little wife, all the interest that good woman had taken in our child. I watched from a distance; I prayed in silence. There was a time when you appeared blind; I marveled at your high spirits, and had not the heart to make you realize that Babs gave me no pleasure. Instead, the very sight of her inflicted pain. So I tried to forget my grief, to go far afield, with the restlessness of suffering."

Constance leaned against him feebly. She was looking back into the past. Yes, she had indeed been blind, but not in the way he thought. Her husband's sorrow escaped her; she had never looked deeply into his soul. She shut him out, she insulted his intellect by supposing

him callous and unobservant, while all the time he was shrinking back to avoid a blow which might have been easier to bear had they faced it hand in hand.

"Poor old Max!" she murmured . "Why didn't you tell me? How could I know when you said nothing? And then you always seemed so happy."

He touched the bright hair lovingly, it was so close to his shoulder.

"I wanted to keep you in ignorance as long as possible," he answered. "To see you saddened by the knowledge was the crowning pain I dreaded in the future."

As he spoke she remembered all the sacrificial instincts which held her dumb, and the thought that they had been returned in secret through that period of darkness warmed her heart with a glow of grateful appreciation.

"It was very good of you," she murmured. "I know just how hard it must have been to keep silent."

Her voice betrayed her thoughts. The meaning tone gave him the key to her mind.

"How do you know?" he queried, raising her chin with his hand, looking long and deeply into the bright face. "Was it that you held back for the same reason? Were we mutually deceiving one another, Con?"

She pursed up her lips temptingly, and he bent to their invitation.

"Something of the sort, I fancy," she whispered. "But it *was* a miracle, wasn't it, Max, a miracle worked by Mary—the wonderful change in Babs?"

He did not answer for a moment. A bird overhead burst into full-throated song, chanting the vespers of the rose garden from his perch on a flower-crowned pillar.

"Mary knew the way," replied Max gently. "She is very clever with children."

He was too lenient to rob Constance of her theory. A miracle was a wide term, but to him the word influence made the stronger demand on his masculine reason.

"You don't believe in miracles," she said.

He answered with quick assurance:

"Indeed I do. All nature is miraculous, ourselves, these flowers, the sunlight, and why not Mary?"

Constance laughed at his evasion.

"Yes, why not Mary?" she said, "if I like to think it is so."

CHAPTER XV

THE SOUL OF THE LILIES

JOSEPHINE had never looked happier; her face was wreathed in smiles and her eyes were bright with the sparkle of girlhood, for this was the day of Oliver's return.

To Arrow it was much as other days, but to the mother everything appeared changed. She felt a little hurt Oliver had not come back to Rutherwyke at the close of the Easter term, preferring to visit a college friend, whose home was in the North. But now at last the happy date of reunion dawned, and all disappointment was forgotten in the joyful anticipation of welcoming her son. Frequently in letters home he mentioned Rye Ireland with affectionate admiration, and just a slight pang of unacknowledged jealousy would assert its presence in the heart of Josephine.

Yet she had written warmly enough in reply, suggesting that Mr. Ireland should be asked to Rutherwyke during the summer vacation.

But Oliver answered evasively that Rye was not quite the sort to enter into the social program sketched by Mrs. Penreath for her son's entertainment. Involuntarily she asked herself what "not quite the sort" could mean. Was this bosom friend of Oliver's beneath him in position, a rough, uncultured fellow whom he feared to bring into their social circle? If so, why had he

visited the Irelands in the North, a visit of which he certainly gave no details? With her usual tact she refrained from showing any curiosity or suspicion, convinced it would be far easier to draw from Oliver the details of this friendship in casual conversation. At present he was delightfully transparent, accustomed to talk freely of his doings. Only of late her quick mother-instinct divined a more serious note in the brief pages of news sent at rather long intervals from Trinity College. At first Oliver described Rye Ireland as a "fine all-round sportsman and a double-Blue," adding that at football he was the finest half-back the team had known for years. Later he was referred to as a deep thinker and a student who might make his mark in the world of letters.

All this made Oliver's refusal to bring him to Rutherwyke the more incomprehensible. Once or twice Josephine mentioned the fact to Arrow, and only realized, after a long pause, her husband's mind was far away, and her statements had fallen on inattentive ears. It was one of Arrow's most trying habits that he appeared to be listening, subsequently revealing by some irrelevant remark that his companion's words were spoken to the air alone.

But to-day any misgivings as to the wisdom of Oliver's college friendships were dismissed absolutely from Josephine's glad thoughts. It was such brilliant weather, picked by the gods for the coming of her boy. In his young life she lived again, traveling back to the romantic standpoint of eighteen summers. She recalled her days of girlish enthusiasm. How wonderful it had been to dance through the night to sweet strains of music, to see in fresh, attractive faces the possible partner of years to come! "Did men think of marriage at

such an early age?" she asked herself, "or would sport and the fascination of athletics naturally predominate, diverting their minds from the poetry of life's springtime?" Of course she knew there was no golden rule. To some Cupid whispered through the April sunshine of child-like hearts, while others never heeded his intrusion till ripe summer reigned or the gentle touch of autumn warned them not to delay. At present she only wanted Oliver to enjoy his freedom, that she might share in his youthful pleasures and revive the old sensations of vanished days, fondly remembered, when she and Arrow fought to win the world.

Josephine had never experienced a keener desire to look young and beautiful for her son's homecoming. With artful fingers she cajoled her hair to assume its most enticing aspect. She was not a vain woman, but as the wife of an artist, who turned in disgust from all that was unlovely, she regarded the study of personal appearance as a sacred duty, a rite to be practiced religiously at the matrimonial shrine, in order to please Arrow's critical eye. She knew at heart she was not witty or intellectual enough to rely entirely upon her personal fascination. She must understand and master the power of outward charm, using its subtle influence on the mind of man. To Josephine the blending of colors and the study of perfect outline appeared as priceless achievements. Less talented women, with smaller banking accounts, would marvel at Mrs. Penreath's harmonious appearance, wondering how she attained such a soothing and artistic effect, since she never gave the impression of extravagance. They little guessed how diligently she trained herself to attain this enviable grace and dignity or the lavish expenditure incurred

over apparently trifling details which made up the important whole.

In Arrow's sight she was a perfectly natural woman, with a talent for preserving her good looks. Josephine triumphed in her knowledge of this fact. Oliver, too, should feel that his mother was strangely young and lovable. Frankly, she told herself that the woman who could not shine as a queen in her domestic kingdom and conquer the hearts of her own menkind was unworthy of her sex. The grumbling mother and the nagging wife appeared in her eyes almost as objectionable as the drunkard or the gambler. In the small details of life Josephine never failed. As Oliver would arrive at tea-time, she arranged that a dainty little meal should be ready for the traveler by the old stone fountain. Wicker tables and easy chairs made an inviting encampment. How home-like and refreshing after hours spent in a hot railway carriage to find this cool haven in the shade of the Rutherwyke trees! Wisely she selected the most picturesque spot in the garden, where the splash of falling water whispered of rest and sweet contentment. Josephine knew, as the sun stole down to its crimson setting and the shadows grew long and mysterious over flower-bed and lawn, she would hear all her boy's confidences as of old. She liked to fancy that for his coming the first fair lilies opened welcoming petals, giving forth their full strength of pungent sweetness. Surely for him the climbing roses ran riot in thick profusion of color, curled leaf and lavish cluster, the ramblers he always looked for so eagerly at this time of year. Like Arrow and herself, he took an intense pride in the life of the garden. It was a dear friend, affecting the thoughts of distant loved ones; it was part of the Penreaths' existence, this flower-world of their own.

Josephine decided not to meet Oliver at the station, since his luggage was always rather a formidable affair, and she preferred to be found seated by the tea-table, ready to administer to his wants. She wore a girlishly simple muslin frock, which the youthfulness of her figure made attractive, and a hat of gossamer lightness, shielding her face from possible sunburn. In his boyish letters Oliver had often called her "little fairy mother" and other terms of affectionate admiration. She had cast a spell over him as a child, and in manhood the vision must not fade to mundane reality. Very wisely this woman, harmless as a dove, wove round herself a halo of brightness to hold those dear to her and present a pleasing picture to the world.

Oliver, driving through Abbotts Brooke, looked eagerly from right to left, recognizing familiar faces and friendly salutations. With the poor of the village the breezy, high-spirited boy, grown rapidly to manhood, was a popular figure whom they hailed as friend. Many a kind deed of Master Oliver's was recorded, usually capped by some amusing quotation explained by the remark: "For there! he's such a one for a joke!"

As the carriage drove up Pilgrim's Way he signed to the coachman to stop at the garden gate, remarking he would walk through the grounds to the house. The path was one of his favorites, leading through the lily garden to the fountain, where he knew his mother would be waiting. He loved the long stately lines of Madonna lilies, the beautiful old white specimen grown in England since the end of the sixteenth century. He was gardener enough to realize the capricious nature of these flowers and to have heard many contradictory reports as to the soil which best suited them. At Rye Ireland's home, a castle with vast stretches of flowering acres, the lilies

refused to flourish, while in a simple cottage garden in the village they reared stately buds. Possibly the sheltered spot of the humble abode explained the lilies' preference for natural, unprepared soil.

Never before had the Rutherwyke lilies triumphed over every obstacle with such a brave show of health. They stood, a white regiment, shoulder to shoulder, on each side of the path, making an avenue of bloom. Oliver had seen the Madonna lily luxuriating in hot, dry, sloping gardens, in sunny walks and shady positions sheltered by trees or buildings, but until now Rutherwyke failed to produce such full, proud glory, such grand texture. The scent was so powerful and peculiar that it seemed as if the air for miles around must carry to distant hamlets the perfume of those tender, waxlike leaves.

Oliver paused, spellbound by this wealth of pure beauty. The fragrance so piercing, yet delicious, seemed half stunning him after the close railway journey. He felt intoxicated by these flowering stems, presenting their wealth of wondrous blossom to his astonished eyes. Their subtlety stole through the summer air and stirred his senses strangely. He fancied the influence of the pungent odor took a direct personality, growing and strengthening with every breath he drew. He was enveloped in the soul of the lilies. They were spirit forms peopling the garden, they whispered messages, they held music, they were angels chanting the hymns of the spheres. The surprising dimensions of the blooms which opened pale lips to droning bees, rocking their joyful bodies from petal to petal and diving deep into the heart of prodigal sweetness startled and mystified him. It was a feast of life and rejoicing, a table spread of wide, succulent leaves, whose fragrance took

possession of the very atmosphere, making it their own. It was a lavish invitation accepted by winged insects in their sunny glory, a garden of vast inspiration, a natural cloister in which a saint might walk with measured tread, holy eyes and sacred, elevated thoughts. Gradually he became conscious something unusual was about to happen. It amounted to a sure conviction, a strong disturbing thought, an intuitive knowledge. The old familiar garden held an air of mystery, beautiful yet paralyzing; it was new, with the enchantment of some incomprehensible element. But how had the place changed? Why did everything appear so wondrously attractive? For years he walked down that same path at lily-time, but the flowers never possessed such an amazing personality or bore a spiritual message. In the past he thought of them merely as pretty acquisitions to the garden, but to-day he wondered if really they could claim some twinship with angelic choirs, whispering of unseen witnesses through the veined channels of their leaves. The splendor of their presence flooded the grounds of Rutherwyke with overwhelming whiteness. Their stems trembled at the faintest breath of wind, making a sensitive movement, uncanny in its response to influences. Then, as the gentle movement ceased, a deep, soulful stillness fell on the broad borders like the lull following a storm.

Suddenly upon the glistening path a figure appeared with lowered eyes and soft, slow steps. It was Mary coming from the studio on her way to the cottage which had once been Monk's. She looked strangely pale, yet radiantly beautiful, as, unconscious of Oliver's presence, she passed down the avenue of Madonna lilies.

Possibly she was tired from her ceaseless endeavor to inspire in Arrow Penreath the true essence of the

character he endeavored to portray. The artist was now at the stage when, to his own astonishment, he sought advice from his model. Often she would move to his side and give him the benefit of her ideas. In the past he could picture himself laughing to scorn the very notion that a lady gardener, unskilled in the art of painting, could possibly offer him any helpful suggestions. But suddenly his assurance in self failed, and he turned to the woman, who appeared to know instinctively how to make the canvas live. Sometimes she stood close beside him, and laying one hand on his arm, pointed with the other to details in the work unworthy of her ideal. The touch of those light fingers on his sleeve appeared to wake in his brain some entirely new train of thought, to obliterate the weary sensation produced by natural fatigue and revive the smoldering energies till they blazed into a furnace of ambitious longing.

No work completed in the past could touch the high level of this new endeavor. It was more than a picture to him, it was almost a living creation, a figure of flesh and blood, with speaking eyes, parted lips, heaving breast.

Only that same afternoon, as Oliver made his way to the lily-garden, Arrow exclaimed in a burst of admiration:

"The picture asks the world to take away the prayers they offer at Mary's shrine, and see, the woman here is so alive, so beautiful, so pure, she defeats her own purpose; she almost makes me kneel to her in prayer."

As he spoke he saw the color fade in his model's cheeks. For the moment he fancied she drooped like a flower beneath the first blast of winter, and it seemed that the life in the real Mary was passing into the visionary form on his easel. Then she moved to the

door, and throwing it open, leaned against the broad oak paneling.

"I am tired," she confessed for the first time—"terribly tired."

Until now, through all the long, hot days, no murmur had passed her lips.

"Tired!" he exclaimed, as if such a thing were impossible.

She made a silent sign of assent.

He looked at his watch impatiently.

"Dear me! It's five o'clock, and Oliver will be back. How the hours fly! I suppose you want me to let you off. I had hoped to work till seven."

Mary turned away.

"Then you must work alone," she said softly, and was gone.

So light her step, he could half believe she vanished into thin air before his eyes. He passed his hand over his forehead, then looking again, saw that the door had closed without a sound. He glanced back at the picture, and the pleading face gave him a guilty sensation when he remembered his words:

"She almost makes me kneel to her in prayer."

He addressed the painting timidly, feeling as if Mary Aquila must still be near him:

"You will make men pray perchance to the Son you bore, but you will never make them forget His mother. They will see your face, hear your message and you will lift them to the very gate of heaven."

The silent room accentuated the whispered comment, and only the long pause which followed made him realize Mary was no longer there.

As she stole away from the studio door she passed through the grounds with downcast, tear-dimmed eyes,

avoiding the distant fountain where Josephine sat waiting by the tea-table for the coming of her boy.

If Mary saw Oliver, she paid no heed to his presence. His shadow might have been cast by one of the tall flowering stems. As she drew nearer, he clearly perceived she was unaware that a human occupant stepped back and stood against the mass of wondrous bloom. The blue of her gown by the hedge of lilies enhanced her Madonna-like appearance, and just for a moment Oliver thought he was dreaming, as this woman of unmistakable beauty transformed the scene into a living poem.

He dared not speak or break the spell. He did not question where she came from—who she was. Enough for him that in her eyes, raised a moment to the dazzling sun, sacred fires gleamed mysteriously, while her features held all the purity of the lily in its prime. Suddenly he seemed to understand the true significance of this wondrous vision. When first he came upon the flowers and paused, entranced by that vast regiment of blossom, she was nearing the spot and it was her influence, combined with the scent of the lilies, which set them chanting the music of the spheres heard only by his waking soul.

Had she not passed so near to him that he could touch her garments, Oliver would have mistrusted his own sight.

She was so unlike the earth-women of his acquaintance. The pure tone of her skin borrowed its spiritual whiteness from the lily. Her very movements reminded him of a pale sunlit cloud sailing across a sky of blue.

He opened his lips to speak, but no words came. He watched her with dilated eyes and fast-beating heart until she was out of sight. Then he drew a deep breath. The blood rushed to his head. He turned dizzy and the

lilies whirled before his gaze in rapid flight. Yet he knew in reality they still stood proudly, giving their sweetness to greedy, rollicking bees.

As the sensation of giddiness passed he forgot his mother waiting eagerly by the fountain, forgot she would know by the returning carriage he was already in the garden, and turned, as if compelled, in the direction of Monk's cottage. He felt he must look once again, to make sure his eyes had not deceived him. He wanted to convince himself that the figure in blue was really a living human being and no fancy of his brain, conjured up by the mysterious magic of the lilies.

He noticed, as the cottage came in sight, how spotlessly white its walls appeared against the background of green. He had never fully appreciated before the picturesque beauty of this small building. He drew near shyly, longing to peep in at the window for a glimpse of the woman who vanished from sight through the open door.

He crept up on tiptoe by a side path and could see distinctly through the open casement into Mary's plainly furnished room. She was seated on a wooden chair, with Sam upon her knee, his tiny arms securely fastened round her neck and his soft baby cheek resting against her shoulder. In lisping language he was telling her the details of his sunny hours. She smiled over the story of childhood's guileless joys, tempered by small but earnest labors in a tiny plot of ground known as "Sam's garden!"

Oliver watched Mary's eyes kindle with all the tender sympathy of motherhood, and he never doubted for a moment this was her child. Fascinated by the picture, eager to break in with some question to the pretty golden-haired boy, the traveler never noticed Josephine

coming quickly down the garden path, with tremulous expectation written on her face. For a moment she paused to gaze at the figure by the window. There stood the son who had tarried too long at Rye Ireland's home, still so engrossed by new influences that his mother's longing for sight, speech and touch escaped his memory. Surely he must feel her nearness now, must guess how she ached to hold him to her heart. He would turn and catch the light in those hungry eyes, fixed upon him with their warm invitation. They would undoubtedly draw him to her, if only by the power of unshed tears.

Suddenly Oliver bent forward, his arms were on the window-sill now, and he was speaking to the inmates of the cottage. A moment later and Sam's curly head appeared. The child was evidently standing on a chair, which made him even taller than the visitor.

Fearful lest Mary should see her, Josephine turned away, too sick with disappointment to join the trio and meet her boy in the society of others. She had thought all day of that first sweet hour alone, when he would spring from the carriage and draw her toward the cozy chairs under the Rutherwyke trees.

Slowly Josephine returned, to wait patiently until it should please Oliver to seek her by the fountain. She told herself, with a forced smile, she did not mind. A mother's claim was so great, that she could afford to step back occasionally and wait until the world proved to the son that the mother-heart held for him the purest gold. She hated jealous people; it was such an insult to themselves, such a compliment to others. She had no wish to flatter, even by a thought, the lady gardener and her protégé, known in the past as "Benn's brat." Yet the garden had lost its beauty and the sky looked gray to her now. After a day of excited anticipation,

this longed-for hour appeared strangely empty and colorless.

Porterton brought out tea, with a surprised glance toward the empty chair.

"I thought Mr. Oliver was here, madam," he said. "Shall I sound the gong or take the tea back?"

Josephine was too proud to summon her son. She made a sign to Porterton to deposit his burden in its warm cozy on the tray.

"Mr. Oliver will be here in a minute," she replied. "You need not sound the gong."

She did not want Porterton to suspect she had already seen the traveler, without a word of greeting or a welcoming smile, as a stranger from afar, whose very presence was forgotten. Josephine watched the man retire, then clasped her hands and sat staring with vacant eyes at the smoothly mown grass. She had no dreams now of what the future would bring; she was just forcing her mind to remain blank. So successful was the attempt that she did not hear Oliver's step upon the lawn until his shadow fell across her line of vision. Then she sprang up with a little cry of joy.

The young arms caught her in their strong, boyish embrace.

Oliver's kisses seemed wiping away all the misery of the past few moments. He looked so pleased—so very pleased to see the loved face again.

"I have a confession to make," he said, "and I believe you know already what it is or you would have come to find me. I went to the gardener's cottage to talk to a sweet little child and look at a beautiful woman. I followed a blue-gowned figure from the lily borders, partly because I thought she was a dream. I did not know any

one could have quite such a saintly face. Mother, do you think she is a saint in disguise?"

His evident earnestness, his open enthusiasm showed Josephine he had no idea of hiding his thoughts from her. He was just the same warm-hearted Oliver who had left her in the spring.

She passed over the subject of Mary in a few light words. Miss Aquila, she acknowledged, had a very lovely as well as a very good face, and doubtless a number of people, if the truth were known, came under the category of saints. Then before he could pursue the conversation, she was asking him questions about himself and pressing upon him delicious home-made cakes. Once more her heart sang the glad songs of youth revived as she remembered her elaborate plans for Oliver's summer entertainment.

She was quite ready to unfold them as she stirred her tea and added more cream to his cup.

"I have been thinking, Oliver," she began confidentially, "that Rutherwyke wants waking up. Your father and I have drifted into a terrible groove, and, after all, we are not such very old people."

She laughed joyously at the words, well aware of her faculty for preserving a youthful appearance and conscious that she possessed social gifts of no mean order, only awaiting resurrection until Oliver's manhood. Certainly he appeared grown enough to warrant this sudden awakening of forces which had slept through many a long year.

She paused to read in his eyes the excited interest her words demanded. Instead she observed no encouragement and momentarily wondered if her sight deceived her. Possibly he did not understand that she referred to a round of social engagements and a scheme for

entertaining both the county families and numerous London friends.

"You know," she continued, "this place is positively ideal as a setting for garden parties, balls, dinners or anything you like to name. We have so much room, we need never be overcrowded. It is quite easy for friends to motor here from town. I am anxious you should start life in a really good set, and I can arrange it so easily if I just trouble to look people up. Not every one could drop out of the world and then expect to beckon society back all in a moment. But it is safe for us—because of Arrow. I fancy you can hardly realize your father's fame or the vast income derived from his pictures. His name will live as one of the greatest masters of his time. I want you to benefit by your relationship to so great a man. Do not underestimate his genius."

Oliver knew that his mother spoke truly and bowed his head in silent acquiescence.

A sensation of fear knocked suddenly at Josephine's heart as she watched her son's knitted brow and grave unresponsive expression. Surely his face held some secret, to which he alone could give the key. If a mystery were to be solved, the explanation must come from him direct, and she waited for his answer with her nerves strung to a strange pitch of expectation.

"Why don't you speak, Oliver?" she asked, her voice trembling. "Have you some trouble on your mind? Oh! you know I shall not be hard on you; I can bear anything better than silence. I thought my suggestion would give such pleasure, instead you haven't even smiled. If it were not so absurd, I could almost imagine you looked displeased. Yet my plans were all for you, dear—all for you and your happiness."

To-day Josephine's low voice lost its note of studied artificiality and rang clear and true with the deep passions of the heart. To Oliver's ears it made terrible music.

He looked up, and his face was utterly unreadable. A problem lurked in the thoughtful eyes, a puzzle reigned round the tightly compressed lips, while the clenched hands denoted his inward struggle to meet Josephine with absolute candor and bold sincerity, however difficult the task.

He glanced from right to left as if to make sure they were absolutely alone. He had the air of one who realized the work at hand must prove hard and painful, yet his expression denoted force of will, which gave the face new strength and the power, so rare in youth, of knowing exactly what to do.

Then, turning to Josephine, he drew his chair nearer and opened his lips to speak.

CHAPTER XVI

A TALK BY THE FOUNTAIN

"MOTHER," he said, "you must not think I am ungrateful. A few months ago those same suggestions of yours would have seemed to me—just as they seem to you now—utterly delightful."

She put out her hand and laid it on his arm.

"My poor boy, you are in some trouble, which has made all this question of gaiety appear bitter and unlovely in your eyes. How blind I have been! Whatever the sorrow, just let me share your burden and make it my own. We can probably find the way to overcome all those hard trials which darken the future in your eyes."

She thought as she spoke of debts incurred, which might strain even Arrow's purse, or of an early love affair, leaving him sore and wounded. So long as she could see Oliver before her in full health and strength she inwardly resolved, whatever the news, she would smile in the face of disaster and show him the silver lining to the cloud. She felt convinced she could drive the pain from his discouraged soul and plant brightness there instead.

She hoped, indeed, that fate might give her an opportunity of proving her devotion, that when she was no longer by his side he might remember her in connection with loving self-sacrifice.

"You know," she continued quickly, "I would give up anything for your happiness, dear."

He looked at her with deep yearning in his eyes.

"I wonder," he said, stifling a sigh, "if those words were put to the test, whether you would calmly act upon them without a murmur?"

Josephine took his hand. There was something sublime in the smile she turned upon her boy. It was a smile to beautify mere human features into a semblance of divinity, pitying youth's battle with a time-hardened world. It was the smile that defies fate and will never acknowledge failure.

"Only try me," she said. "Who should stand your friend, if not your mother? Shadow must come with sunshine. In life everything has its antithesis. I am ready to share the shade with you. It would be lonely out in the sunshine all by myself."

Oliver listened with faint suspicion lurking in his eyes. He had gradually discovered, within the last year, that his mother was a woman of less depth than she wished her critics to believe. Of late the realization came upon him with a sense of shock. She was a beautiful *poseuse*—always ready to enhance the picturesque side of existence by making herself agreeable with sympathetic words and a decorative presence. He doubted how she would face any real trial.

He glanced down now and spoke with hesitation.

"You vow you would give up anything for my happiness?"

His words were uttered in slow, uncertain accents.

"Yes, Oliver, anything in the world. I would sooner die than fail you."

Josephine's answer came quickly; she felt absolutely sure of herself.

He shook his head, nevertheless, as he replied candidly:

"I very much doubt it, mother dear. Remember, you are speaking in ignorance of circumstances. That vow must be proved before I can believe its sincerity or rely on your good will."

She turned upon him a pair of glistening eyes, full of reproach at the apparently hard statement.

"That does not sound like you, Oliver," she declared. "Is it possible you cannot trust your mother? Surely I have never made unfulfilled promises. Look back at your childhood and let that speak for me."

Her injured tone gave him courage to continue. Perhaps, after all, he had misjudged her.

"Well," he murmured softly as his arm stole round her shoulder, "I do ask you to give up something you hold dear. I ask it from the bottom of my heart."

"Tell me," she whispered half joyfully, for now she felt she was on the very brink of triumph. "If you want money and fear to approach your father, I can help you from my own savings. I could even sell my jewels. Nothing counts in comparison with your peace and future ease. You are my only child, and perhaps in time you will realize the strength of a mother's love."

She felt as she spoke as if Oliver were all she had, since Arrow's work so absorbed him he hardly appeared part of the home at all. He was a brilliant star shining from a distant firmament, engrossed, preoccupied, unable to spare time for the small happenings of daily life. Very gently Josephine tried to explain this to her son, without in any way blaming her husband for the sense of loneliness from which she suffered.

"Then, mother," said Oliver, raising his head and speaking out in a clear, steady voice, "I ask you to give up all you have gladly and without a word of regret. I ask you to give me up, your only child. I realize it is

no light demand, especially under the circumstances, but I make it in the name of a Higher Power and for the sake of a call which is so distinct, so persistent—I hear it night and day—always saying the one word, 'Come!' It bids me leave father and mother; it draws me with irresistible force to Christ's vineyard to labor for Him. I must obey and go far from you and Rutherwyke, to another continent. I don't know for the moment just where my work will lie, but that does not rest in my hands, others more experienced will guide and direct me in my great endeavor."

He was not looking at his mother; his gaze traveled to a bank of clouds drifting toward the setting sun, tinged by faint pink light. The words he had uttered apparently carried his thoughts from Josephine to some wonderful dreamland of spiritual ambition, a sphere where the toiler may rest and draw inspiration from a fountain of pure water, unseen by material eyes.

Mrs. Penreath remained for the moment absolutely frozen. From head to foot the blood in her body congealed. Her heart stood still. She held her breath, as if in the throes of some awful nightmare, from which she must wake—or die. Had voice been given her she would not have dared ask her son to repeat his words. She tried to believe they existed in some wild fancy of her brain. Then gradually her nerves began to assert authority. Once more the circulation stirred in her veins, warning her of life and reality, turning her hot and cold with fierce sensations of paralyzed chill or burning indignation. At last, with a bitter sense of realization, she inwardly acknowledged she was singularly worldly and distressingly human. Had he told her of some disgraceful escapade, a liaison, the breaking of which would involve heavy expenditure, she knew she

could have faced the knowledge with heroic fortitude, piloting him to safety with the diplomatic skill of a woman of the world. But now she felt baffled, horrified, amazed. This boy, whom she pictured shining in society, appreciated, admired, sought after, asked her to give him up, to let him go far away to some distant continent and work for the good of others.

He mistook her silence for sympathy and his spirits rose.

"Good little mother," he said, "I might have known you would behave like a brick. It was very weak of me to misjudge your woman's heart. It only shows how little I really understood you."

Josephine drew away from his encircling arm, and for the first time since he had spoken he fully met her eyes. Could they be the same eyes which gazed into his so lovingly a few minutes ago? Deep down in their depths of scorn and horror lay the look that might lurk in the glance of a tigress, ready to defend her young against malignant foes. The sockets were bloodshot, the expression wild and almost savage, no tears, only keen resentment and the knowledge of danger near at hand, which must be met and conquered.

"Mother, why do you look at me like that? I hardly seem to know you. Are you ill?"

She clenched her hands and turned to him with a fierce desire to hear the worst, to inflict self-torture sooner than cling to one soothing shred of ignorance or hope.

"Have I rightly understood?" she asked quickly. "Is it possible you want to leave your home, your parents, your country, that you propose giving up your social position, your chances of success, to waste your life in some uncivilized corner of the globe—as a missionary? I cannot credit such a suggestion could be anything but

a fit of passing madness. Surely, if sane, you would hardly be so blind to your own interests or so unjust to us. How could you, Oliver Penreath, the son of whom I meant to be so proud, dream of giving up the world on the very threshold of manhood, to squander the best years of life in foreign lands? Why, it does not bear a thought; it is impossible. If you like to take holy orders, by all means do so, and with brains, money and influence you may prove a credit to your parents yet, but for Heaven's sake give up any idea of missionary work abroad, unless you would break your mother's heart."

Oliver listened in silence. He could read in her tone all the agony of resentment, bringing her to the verge of hysteria.

"Perhaps," he said, "we had better discuss my future when you feel calmer and have become more accustomed to the idea."

His face gave no sign of relenting, his voice sounded harsh and unmoved. He gazed at her with mingled pity and disapproval.

Angered by his manner, she answered him in raised accents of sharp decision:

"No, we must talk now. Let us thrash this matter out. We can surely find some course which will satisfy you and yet banish forever any idea of this preposterous business. Your youth alone makes the proposition ridiculous."

He tossed his head, a familiar trick of childhood. He was on the defensive now and his color heightened.

"Rye Ireland says one cannot begin too young," he said shortly.

The retort gave Josephine a fresh cue. So this was

Rye Ireland's work. He was the enemy fighting for her child.

"Now I understand," she muttered, and Oliver could see how deadly white she had grown. "Your new friend put these absurd ideas into your head. He has mesmerized you into believing you have a vocation for wrestling with the souls of the heathen. A nice friend, indeed, to try and separate an only son from his parents!"

Oliver's color rose.

"Please, mother, keep Ireland's name out of this. His example has done more for me than any home influence. He is the only human being I have ever met who is near perfection. Though rich, he is giving up all for the splendid work and the heavenly reward. He knows I have a vocation and he wants me with him. We shall go away together. We shall give our lives if needful. There are few enough, God knows, ready and willing for sacrifice."

Josephine indulged a short laugh, which to Oliver touched the heights of cruelty and scorn. She saw him shrink from her as from something evil, yet she spoke her thoughts aloud, undaunted.

"Indeed, you will do nothing of the kind, for I shall take care to see your father stops your allowance until you come to your senses and consult our wishes as to your future. I will talk to Mr. Ireland myself or write and explain the position to him. If he is all you say, he will be the last to further a family quarrel."

Oliver seemed unmoved by the threat, which puzzled Josephine's watching eye.

"It is entirely in your father's hands," she added. "You must acknowledge that. You would be penniless without his aid."

Her voice trembled with agitation, though she tried to appear calm.

The young man shook his head. As his mother grew more excited he became strangely quiet and determined.

"Rye believes I have the true missionary spirit. I should hardly like to tell you what he said about my preaching."

Josephine gave a little gasp.

"You—you—preached!"

"Yes, at a revival service in the North. Though the Irelands have such a magnificent place, they give half their income to further missions abroad, and they do not try to hinder their son's work. But even if he met with opposition, he has an independent fortune, and because he pities my dependence on others, he has promised to pay all my expenses should you or father refuse help. I told him I thought you might not like the choice I had made, and he quite understands. I shall not return to college, as I expect to hear in a few days the date of our departure and all particulars of the journey."

The words were terribly final and so full of defiance that for the moment Josephine felt baffled. As she gradually recovered from her first sense of shock she realized that for once her old armor of diplomacy had fallen to pieces under the strain of anger. She was, after all, too human to play the actress when Fate drew her to the brink of personal suffering. She had allowed Oliver to see the real Josephine and thus lost ground. "How indeed could she expect to win him by reproaches and harsh words?" she asked herself inwardly as the truth drove home. It was evident some influence stronger than her own had set its seal upon Oliver's life. His allusion to Rye Ireland revealed a hold which rose

to formidable heights as she dwelt upon the significance of her son's resolve.

She did not attempt to argue further, the final announcement appeared to crush her last hope, to rob her of defense. Fate rose against her, and since the boy could command money, if his parents cast him adrift, it was unlikely he would listen to advice or threats. He was in the mood to welcome hard living, poverty, labor, sacrifice. Nothing would turn him from his purpose now, save the bitter price of experience.

She sat with clasped hands and a look of dumb misery on the face which less than an hour ago appeared so girlishly happy. Oliver watched the nervous twitching of her lips and the gathering tears beneath her lashes with a sense of vague misgiving. He wanted to comfort her, to make her see with his eyes, to bury forever her objections and misgivings. But suddenly he became painfully conscious of his youth. Limited knowledge of women and their ways closed his mother's mind to him like a sealed book. He tried in vain to interpret her present attitude. Was it the slumbering of a volcano or a silent surrender to the will of God? He could not pretend to guess. He merely realized that his mother was thinking deeply. Her face betrayed signs of mental struggle and yet conveyed no message. He felt shut out, utterly alone, as if indeed some stranger were seated beside him, to whom he dared not make even a timid advance. To find himself thus in the presence of the mother he loved hurt his sensitive nature and made all the world look dark. Presently, just as he decided to break the unbearable silence, Josephine rose. She had dashed away her tears before they marred her delicate complexion and now turned toward the house, apparently unconscious of Oliver's presence.

Once again she had perfect control of herself, and her brain rather than her heart guided each studied movement.

Oliver sprang up, following hotly at her heels. His pleading voice at her elbow struck her as singularly boyish.

"I say, mother, you are not going to take it like this, surely? You never did sulk."

She walked on, quickening her steps.

"You can talk to me again," she said slowly, "when the date of your departure is decided and Mr. Ireland sees fit to send you particulars of the journey."

The cold, passionless words silenced Oliver. Then already she accepted the position.

"Where are you going?" he asked, and perhaps it was well for Josephine she did not allow herself to turn and catch his crestfallen expression.

"Back to the house. I want to speak to your father, but I think you had better not disturb him until he is ready to leave the studio. You see, he knew you would be home at tea-time and did not trouble to join us. I can tell him of your safe arrival. We dine as usual at eight."

The words sounded oddly formal, but Oliver was too young to guess the effort they cost his mother. He experienced an uncomfortable sensation of being shut out from all the loving intimacy of old days.

"Very well," he answered shortly. "I'll go round the garden alone."

He strode off in the direction of the Monk's Walk.

Directly he was out of sight Josephine quickened her steps, almost running to the studio.

She did not wait to knock, but burst in upon Arrow with heaving chest and blazing eyes.

Her husband was seated alone before his picture, studying the work with such a concentrated expression, she paused, half fearing to address him.

He looked up, nodded in her direction, smiled and glanced back at the pictured face of "Mary."

Josephine went quickly to his side.

"Arrow," she said, "Arrow," and clasped her hands about his neck.

The tears she had held back so long suddenly broke forth, while her body shook with deep sobs.

The man, roused from his dream of work, caught the trembling figure in supporting arms. He could almost have fancied the reflection of his wife's tears gleamed in the life-like eyes shining out from the canvas, with their strangely living expression.

As Josephine wept she was dimly aware he still gazed at the marvelously realistic portrait of Mary Aquila. The power of the face, the words spoken by Constance Eastlake, the many small happenings tinged with mysterious significance, wrung from Josephine's heart a whispered confession, quite incomprehensible to Arrow:

"Mary must help us. Mary will help us. He—Oliver—went to her first!"

CHAPTER XVII

MARY THE MOTHER

OLIVER did not meet his father until Arrow appeared dressed for dinner. He greeted his son cheerfully, as if nothing unusual had occurred, though his manner was slightly abstracted. Oliver knew this as a sign of overwork, and immediately questioned him about his latest picture.

"It is a biblical subject, and I dare say your mother told you Miss Aquila is sitting to me. I am painting her as the Virgin Mary. We hope the picture will carry a somewhat unexpected and startling lesson."

Oliver had never heard his father use the word "we" before in connection with his art. The small incident set his son thinking.

"If it is like Miss Aquila, I could imagine the face alone would make men better and women purer," answered the young man with strange earnestness.

As Oliver spoke he watched the door anxiously for the appearance of Josephine. Arrow followed the direction of his eyes.

"Your mother is dining in her room, she did not feel well enough to come down," said the artist as if in answer to a direct question.

Oliver started, an expression of mingled annoyance and guilt creeping over his face.

"Not well," he stammered. "I'll run up and see her."

Arrow laid a detaining hand on his arm.

"No, she particularly asked to be alone—in fact, to put it plainly, she does not wish to see you again to-night. Your talk of going away has upset her very much. She quite broke down in my studio and declared she could not appear before the servants with red eyes to cause comment. So you must be content with my society for this evening, and after dinner I shall be interested to hear your plans for the future."

The calm tone puzzled Oliver. Was there not a spice of hidden sarcasm in the voice addressing him so suavely? He felt chilled and uncomfortable. His mother's indisposition would naturally be laid at his door, and her desire for complete solitude cut deeply.

"I am sorry if anything I said upset mother," he murmured lamely. "You see, she cannot understand the bracing influence of people like the Irelands. When I am with Rye or his parents it seems the most natural thing in the world that I should accept the call, but here—well, here it appears——"

He hesitated for the right word, and Arrow supplied it with a rather hard smile: "The most unnatural, eh?"

The sudden announcement of dinner cut short the conversation, much to Oliver's relief. He followed his father sadly to the familiar dining-room, which looked so strange without Josephine—almost as if she were dead, he thought. He ate with little appetite, for the night seemed full of oppression, the air was heavy and his mother's vacant seat appeared an open reproach, which constantly attracted his eye. He asked many questions about her during the meal. What had she been doing lately? Was her health good? Did she often suffer from headaches?

Arrow's evasive replies revealed his ignorance. Later on he vouchsafed a mild explanation.

"You see," he said, by way of apologizing for his lack of knowledge, "I have been so tied to my easel that really I see very little of your mother just now. She is extremely good when I am busy, never troubles me with mundane matters or resents the long hours given to work."

Oliver was not quite satisfied with the reply. He looked rather sternly at his father.

"But you have the evenings together. Surely then she tells you the details of the day."

Arrow disliked cross-examination. He sipped his wine with a little shrug of weary shoulders.

"At night I am often too tired to talk. Josephine is very tactful; she knows when to be silent."

Oliver took the hint and asked no more questions. His father leaned back in the large oak chair, resting his hands on its broad arms, apparently desirous of the silence his wife respected with unselfish resignation.

Already the servants were handing dessert; in a few minutes father and son would be alone. Oliver refused wine, cigarettes and cigars. Since his friendship with Rye Ireland, he neither smoked nor drank alcohol. He was slightly pale this evening, and it seemed as though Arrow communicated his lethargy to his now silent companion.

As the door closed on the retreating servants the artist suddenly bent forward, and fresh vitality rushed in a flood of color to his face.

"Now, Oliver, let me hear your plans," he said in a voice so full of hidden meaning that it startled the young man. "You are going away from us, that, I understand, is settled. I object, your mother objects, but I gather this makes no difference to you. Your friends who advise you to take the step are powerful

enough to provide funds and charm you away altogether from your old home. That being the case, we don't count. As an outsider, I should like to know some details of the work."

The boy grew crimson as he met Arrow's attack. The scathing words humbled him unpleasantly. He began to feel mean and unheroic.

"I say, father, don't put the matter quite like that; it sounds so horrid."

Arrow drew a dish of fruit nearer and helped himself with deliberation.

"But it is horrid," he retorted; "so why try and disguise the fact?"

Oliver raised a glass of iced water to his lips.

"How would you like," he said, "to be told you must never paint again?"

Arrow smiled away the question.

"Let us keep to the one subject, my boy. I only ask to hear what class of work you expect to be given when these missionary friends send your marching orders to Rutherwyke."

Oliver had longed to confide all the fierce zeal burning in his heart, but his father's tone was so discouraging, it effectually repelled the desire. His answer came in low, wounded accents.

"If mother is annoyed," he said, "please give me credit for some feelings too. I little expected she would shut herself up and refuse to see me. I don't think it was playing fair to prejudice you against my plans before I had a chance of speaking for myself. Why, I was so taken aback by her attitude, I felt quite stupefied, and never even heard the dear old Gabriel bell, though I was listening for it when I came in a few minutes before seven. I could not put mother's face out of

my mind or forget her cruel words. I never had such an unhappy home-coming."

Arrow made no comment. The Gabriel bell to him was an incident of long ago, and Oliver's grievances failed to touch him.

"I used to think," continued the complaining voice, "that mother was unselfish, and so she is in some ways—only look how she considers you! Yet my wishes are trampled on with open scorn, though, after all, they are good wishes and worthy of her sympathy. I can't help suspecting she would have forgiven me any wickedness, while she bitterly resents my desire to live a better life."

His father nodded assent and lighted a cigar.

"There I believe you are right. Both Josephine and myself find this excessive virtue uncommonly hard to swallow."

Oliver leaned with his elbows on the cloth and fixed his father with such eager eyes that for a moment Arrow forgot his own inclinations and remembered only the youthful personality at the table. It struck the boy that here lay a chance to win interest, to place before a prejudiced mind some of the romance and much of the nobility of purpose concealed in this so-called "excess of virtue."

"It is not as tame as perhaps you think," he said, drawing a deep breath. "I may have to go to Labrador, and I know well what that means; I should go with my eyes open. Rye's father used to work among the scanty population along that desperately bleak coast in his younger days when he was strong enough. We should travel hundreds of miles over ice floes in sledges drawn by dog teams. He has often described the vast solitudes, and it is wonderful to catch the atmosphere from a man who is familiar with the ground. You can hardly

realize what it means to the whalers and Eskimos when some one who cares enough to face the music arrives like a God-sent messenger in the midst of their desolation. It is a land of appalling silence or wild hurricane. The missionary takes medicine to suffering people who are cut off from the world, for he must remember the body as well as the soul. Such a work means great personal privation and suffering. To Englishmen, reared in comfort, the cold endured amounts to martyrdom, but the reward comes with the joy you bring and the certain knowledge you are not alone. Don't you feel, father, how great it is to have a life work, to follow a bent which helps instead of hinders your fellow-men? You love your daily toil, you could not live without the sweets of the career you have chosen for yourself. Well, my choice is as dear to me, though so utterly different. I want to reach those human souls, buried from civilization in that snow-bound, wind-swept country, and to bring them the light that can pierce even the darkness of despair. I dream sometimes I am there already, speaking to men who have waited, longed, prayed for the missionary to come, and in my dreams I realize how that terrible solitude can bind the soul to Nature and Nature's God in a way hard to realize here, even though the flowers speak of His handiwork and the sunshine seems like His presence. The lilies to-day were marvelous, they made Rutherwyke seem like heaven. The garden has never been more beautiful. I suppose it is Miss Aquila's doing."

Arrow's face brightened as Oliver spoke of the garden and Mary. He ignored Labrador.

"Ah! you noticed the lilies. She has certainly exerted an influence, even though I have made such demands upon her time. The men work with enthusiasm since her

coming; they put heart into all they do—I suppose for love of her. You may think it is the power of physical beauty, but she has something greater which I cannot pretend to define. You will understand my meaning when you know her better. Your mother and I made her our friend from the first. Yet she is so unassuming that at time her humility embarrasses. Then again, when she asserts herself, one gets a glimpse of the strong character, entirely guided by its own impulses, which are always for the best. Talk to her about these wild plans of yours, and see what she has to say. I shall be curious to hear her views on the subject."

The suggestion appealed to Oliver. In that woman of the saintly face he would find a champion and one who might throw oil on the troubled waters of his parents' opposition. The thought of Mary was the one bright spot now in this home-coming, rife with disappointment.

Arrow moved to the open window to breathe the soft summer night air, full of fragrance. Oliver followed, no longer feeling the air oppressive. Certainly the garden called in mystic language and smote the silent chords of music which made poetry in the soil.

"The scent," he declared, "is more perfect than I ever remember. Have you some new flowers that give out this pungently sweet smell?"

Arrow smiled.

"Sometimes I fancy," he replied, "that all the flowers are new. At any rate the plants have taken a fresh lease of life and give us prodigal measure. I suppose it is an exceptionally good year."

Oliver thought a moment, a puzzled expression on his brow. Then he murmured:

"I suppose so."

He did not like to hark back to the old subject, which

his father now appeared determined to ignore. Evidently he had not succeeded in raising Arrow's interest or sympathy. The artist was far more absorbed in the garden (which next to his painting had become the hobby of his life) than any question of mission work in far-off Labrador. If any outside influence could bring comfort to Oliver, it was the panorama spread before him of those fair flowering acres and the memory of the lilies, standing like sentinels as Mary passed with soft step and strangely mystic presence, through the avenue of bloom.

Just as the picture rose again before his mind a shadowy figure could be traced crossing the lawn. As it drew nearer the moon sailed from behind a cloud, sending a ray of light—like a torch from heaven—to guide the approaching form. This sudden bursting forth of the silver orb, this kindly action of the sky's queen, spiritualized that long stretch of dewy grass, fully revealing its occupant.

"It's Mary," he whispered, unconsciously speaking her Christian name. "She is coming to the house."

Arrow showed no surprise, though he caught in his son's voice a note of keen excitement.

"She is coming to see Josephine. Your mother sent her a note."

Oliver's face fell.

So Mary was allowed into the sanctum closed to him. Josephine could see a comparative stranger, when she shut herself away from her own kith and kin.

"Mother will surely be better now," he said. "I think I'll just run up to her for a minute."

He turned as if to instantly carry out his words, but Arrow caught him roughly by the shoulder.

"I gave her my promise that she should talk to Mary alone."

The eyes of father and son met in challenge.

"Mother is not treating me fairly," said the boy.

The man's heavy hand tightened its hold.

"Perhaps she thinks you have hardly treated her with the fairness a mother deserves. As we make our bed, you know. You cannot figuratively knock her down, trample her under foot and then expect her to rise unscathed. Women like Josephine are not made of very stern material; you ought to see that. She requires gentle handling. If any one can resign your mother to this blow, it is Mary."

The blue-clad figure passed from sight, and Oliver noticed a cloud once more shrouded the face of the moon. The garden looked suddenly dark and empty, robbed of its silver sheen.

So Mary had entered the house. Instinctively the very realization of her presence beneath that roof calmed the resentment in Oliver's breast. Inwardly he vowed he would manage to meet Mary again that same evening, to learn from her lips his mother's attitude, the depth of her bitterness and the possibility of her seeing the matter in another light.

"All right, father," he said, "I promise I won't intrude upon mother until she cares to send for me. It isn't like home while she stays upstairs, but I dare say she will be quite well to-morrow, and perhaps it is kinder to leave her alone."

He tried to catch the sound of a step in the hall. He fancied his father also listened. But Mary had not entered by the front door, Mrs. Penreath having explained in her note she would leave the boudoir window open for the late caller. Mary could come up a side

staircase, and Josephine's bedroom was on the left of the passage. The writer had simply stated she was in trouble, giving no details. "I want your advice, I want your help," she wrote, "and I know it will not be denied."

As Josephine despatched the message Constance Eastlake's words rang persistently in her mind. They returned as clearly as if they had been spoken an hour since. To distract her thoughts from Oliver, she repeated them mechanically:

"When Mary's attention is turned to you, it makes rather a startling impression and is an experience you will probably never encounter in your calm, even life. She gives the full benefit to those who are really troubled."

The old sensation of uncanny alarm faded from Josephine, eliminated by the overpowering shock of Oliver's disclosure. Bitterly she recalled the glowing plans made with Constance, in pleasurable anticipation of future festivities at Rutherwyke. Now the mother felt, if only she could keep her boy in England, she would gladly forego all social triumphs. But the thought of his sudden departure and life in another continent, where he must wrestle with privation and work unceasingly, struck such terror to her soul. She already saw him laid in a foreign grave, sacrificed to unhealthy miasma or cruel cold, murdered possibly by savage black men or heathen Chinese. A whole gallery of horrors passed before her mental vision as she sat without food, unable to read or pray, in the throes of mental distress.

Now and again to relieve the monotony of the passing moments she would pace up and down, struggling to keep back her tears and to crush the dread alarms tormenting her harassed brain.

All the time her heart cried aloud for her child, the

little boy she had rocked on her knee, the happy, laughing lad from school—the Oliver of old.

What had this day done for her?

She looked in the glass, fiercely resenting the blow to her well-preserved beauty. Lines that were new and strange encircled her swollen eyelids. All the delicate coloring of a peach-like skin became marred by the intrusion of tears. She was older, more careworn; she had grown ugly with the disfiguring hand of violent grief.

She took up a powder puff and applied it to the unsightly patches of vivid crimson. She threw aside a drenched handkerchief and scented a clean white square with violet perfume. Her trembling hands tried to arrange the disheveled hair, dressed earlier in the day with lavish skill, for she knew Mary would soon be at her door. She could almost have welcomed those superstitious feelings which appeared so incomprehensible to Arrow, aware that any sensation would be preferable to the aching void at her heart and the vivid recollection of Oliver's nerve-shattering revelation.

Suddenly she remembered her fear, lest the silence of the Angelus should bring disaster to the house. She wondered if, after all, Mary's influence in their midst was sinister and malign? She had certainly brought joy and consolation to the Eastlake household, but here—a shadow appeared which might hide the sunlight forever. What if in one short evening all the music in Josephine's soul were to die forever as the Gabriel bell had died at Arrow's word!

Just as these new-born doubts rushed to her mind a gentle knocking at the door warned her Mary was already on the threshold.

"Come in," she said faintly.

A shadowy form in a long cloak entered with noiseless steps. The cloak was exactly similar to the garment the village women had called miraculous. It hung in graceful folds round this simple Madonna-like figure. In the dimly lighted room Josephine fancied her eyes deceived her and that this could not really be Mary, but some spirit proclaiming her advent, taking her features, paled by a mysterious flame from an unseen lamp.

Josephine put out her hands.

"Is it you?" she asked. "Is it you?"

Her voice was broken. She bent her head and a low sob choked the final utterance.

Mary drew nearer.

"Yes," she murmured softly.

Only one word, but it fell like gold upon the troubled atmosphere. Still, it seemed to Josephine that a phantom voice had spoken.

"Mary, I am so unhappy."

The long cloak fell to the ground and the woman in the plain blue gown came quickly to Josephine's side. Then two tender arms pressed her to a heart which gave forth all the eternal elements of creation's motherhood, the sympathy, glory and endless yearning, the height, depth, fulness of a pure, undying, majestic love.

Josephine was the child held in maternal arms, Mary the mother taking upon herself the burden of that human grief and pain.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HEM OF HER GARMENT

THE words came once more from the sufferer, but with less bitterness:

"Mary, I am so unhappy."

As she spoke she felt the support of those motherly arms, which emphasized her own weakness and depression, realizing she was in contact with strength and a strange, almost overpowering purity. She fancied in the faint light that Mary's face was transparent as crystal. Josephine lost sight of its flesh and blood, instead it appeared as a dazzling image which took the reflection of humanity.

"Tell me, tell me all," said the soft voice, which wooed confidence.

It was more a command than a request. It forced Josephine's spirit to response. She could not have held back her words. Every pang, every withered hope, every fear rose to her lips as though summoned by an oracle. No half-truths were offered to Mary's listening ear. Mrs. Penreath told of the glad day through which she waited for her son, of her sorrow when he tarried at the White Cottage, instead of hastening to her side, of their consequent conversation, just as it occurred word for word, by the old stone fountain. She described his indifference to her objections, his defiance when she suggested his father might prevent the proposed journey.

She did not pause to weigh her phrases or select arguments calculated to put her own case before Mary in the best light. She gave in simple speech each scene of that human drama just as it developed at the time, without embellishments, without exaggeration, without concealment.

Until this moment Josephine looked upon herself as a woman of reserve, one to whom very close and intimate friendships were impossible. She took few to her heart, and, even before her own husband, frequently masked the real woman, offering a shadow more suitable to his fastidious taste. It was a new and inspiriting experience to find herself suddenly drawn into wider channels, to expand beneath the warm light of understanding, to open her heart without the smallest dread of creating a wrong impression. She did not pause to analyze this mysterious sympathy, offered in comparative silence, for Mary's words were so few, that if Josephine had suddenly been called upon to repeat them, she would have declared: "Mary said nothing." Only afterward, when alone with her own thoughts, she came to the startling conclusion that she had spoken to this new friend, to this employee, as she would have spoken in prayer, feeling rather than hearing the answer, knowing grace was given, comfort rendered, without any material proof.

When at last Josephine concluded her story with a brief "that is all," the three short words held a world of pain.

"That is all" conveyed a broken spirit, a life laid low, a heart incapable of sharing her son's high aims, a soul left childless because the child outraged his mother's love, trampling under foot the divine spark of maternal devotion and the burning light of ambition.

Mary heard and pitied. She kept her eyes on the

anguished face and her arms round the trembling figure, drawing Josephine to a couch by the window, that they might watch the moon's triumphant escape from drifting clouds. Once more a great white radiance shone forth, ghostly, mysterious, pale as death, yet deathless throughout all ages, emerging from depths of darkness, from mountain ranges of majestic vapor. With graceful ascent the fair goddess of heathen superstition throwned herself high in the heavens and opened her beauty to the world. Rutherwyke lay bathed in fertilizing dews, while Luna watched over the stars and smiled down upon the earth which she paled to glittering pearl.

Josephine fancied the moon spoke of peace. There was infinite repose in the broad expanse of azure which held that mystic globe. She thought instinctively of the closing flowers, lulled to sleep under the purifying influence of a serene and spotless light. Mary's low voice had some affinity with the elements, soft as summer breezes, soothing as rain on a spring morning, giving refreshment to growing roots and bursting buds, impelling the earth to offer up her hidden fund of treasure.

"Poor heart of sorrow!" Mary whispered. "Did you not know on the very day you bore your child that a mother's lot means sacrifice and pain? Women seek this sorrow, yearn and pray for it, they face their great duty with the fortitude of ignorance, and then weep when the day of reckoning comes. Did you imagine it would be joy—all joy, Josephine?" (The name was spoken so naturally Mrs. Penreath hardly knew it had passed Mary's lips.) "You gave your son his being gladly, and then you forgot that in time he would drift away, leaving you perhaps to seek him sorrowing. Do you ever think what a Mother bore long ago, when she pondered in her heart the destiny of a divine Son? Do

you ever try to probe the hidden years at Nazareth? Do you ever feel in sympathy the agony of soul endured by the Mother called upon to see her own flesh and blood lifted up, a scarred and bleeding sacrifice for cruel, merciless people? Does not the weight of your bitterness lose in comparison? Can you not hear her saying to you across the ages: 'Was there ever sorrow like unto mine?' "

Josephine looked at Mary in sudden wide-eyed wonder, experiencing a dream-like sensation, as if indeed she were in a sacred, unreal presence.

"Mary," she whispered, "I know you would say that a prayer to the Virgin is an added pang. You made Arrow silence the Gabriel bell, you inspired his picture, you gave him that strange idea of portraying, not a halo-crowned Madonna, but merely Joseph's wife, the mother of Joseph's children, the humble guardian of a simple home, the weaker vessel, subject to man. But when you speak to me of her anguish, when I remember that she was chosen for a miraculous work by God Himself, I could almost cry to her now to come to me with comfort and heal my wound. In the old days, when it was Arrow's whim to have the Angelus rung night and morning, I often said aloud, 'Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, both now and at the hour of death.' I should like to say it again to-night, just because she was a mother who suffered deeply and because God seems so very far away and I am afraid of Him."

Was it the light of the moon changing Mary's face to such a startling pallor? The arms enfolding Josephine loosed their hold, while the tall figure in the blue robe stood up, towering over her, the muscles growing taut and stiff with sudden sharp contraction. Mary had never looked so tall as now. Her eyes had never

blazed with such unearthly fire. Those eyes of great softness and beauty changed to lamps of flame, stars snatched from the firmament, catching the moon's rays and warming them into beams of sunlight. She stretched out her arms, forming her body to the shape of a cross, while her fingers moved, as though to beckon wandering spirits nearer, to summon invisible aid.

"So far away," she said, "only because your eyes are held, only because you cannot see. Afraid of infinite love, afraid of deathless truth. Pray still, poor fainting heart, pray without ceasing to the One you fear in your blindness, or pray to the Cross and its immortal burden, but spare the woman in the crowd below. She points you to the victim; she says from Calvary: 'He alone can save.' Did the tortured thief look down and pray to Mary? Did the disciples turn to her for guidance? Did the writers of her time think fit to record any chronicle of her life when the Son had risen from His tomb? Oh! unhappy Josephine, why hesitate when He can hear, when He can answer? Would you seek to break her rest and peace by adding to the prayers which beat upon her heart, tearing it with a thousand wounds? Those who love her place hourly the weight of saintship on her soul, which sighs to lie alone, unworshiped at the Saviour's feet, remembered only by Him. Yet men cry unceasingly: 'Ever-Virgin, deliver us.' 'Blessed Mary, grant us peace. Break the sinners' fetters, restore light to the blind, dispel our ills.' And He who through meekness chose Her to be His Mother, knows that she sorrows greatly when the world would rob her of her low estate."

Josephine listened to the quick flow of words, spoken with passion, wrung from the depths of a soul oppressed. She fancied for a moment the lesson of Arrow's picture must have dwelt upon Mary's brain, disturbing

it to the point of madness. She forgot her own sorrow in contemplating the pale, tragic face which looked beyond the walls of the faintly lighted room, kindling a sense of majesty and wonder. The shadows about Mary's form suddenly appeared majestic. Surely they were materializing into a hazy, circling mist, caught by the rays of the moon and touched with silvery brightness.

Josephine saw the change, marveling that light could play such strange tricks with the folds of the blue gown, sombered into a deeper shade than when day revealed the richness of its tone. She felt deeply grieved that any word of hers should hurt Mary's sensitive spirit, especially after the sympathy she had shown and the tender touch of maternal love, which meant so much to the aching heart.

"I will do as you say," murmured Mrs. Penreath. "I will pray to the Virgin's Son to give me back my son. I was going to ask if you would speak to Oliver? I am sure you cannot think it right for a boy of his age to defy both parents, leave his home and take up work for which he is utterly unfitted. I do not believe his desires are sincere. It is a case of having caught the infection from a friend who does not scruple to exercise a powerful influence over Oliver's mind. Nothing I can say will break down his determination, for he looks upon me as a desperately worldly woman, and through that same worldliness I lose ground. But to-day he told me you had the face of a saint. Mary, he would listen to you. Oh! give him back to me, make him understand my sufferings, bring him to reason. Constance Eastlake said you seemed to come where there was trouble, to put things right. You restored her to happiness by almost

a miracle. Won't you—can't you give me back my child?"

Josephine clasped her hands as if indeed she were praying to this Mary of earth, relying on her to use some powerful weapon that would dispel the sorrow of Oliver's home-coming.

For a moment Miss Aquila made no reply, and a heavy silence fell. Josephine listened for a quick, reassuring retort, but gradually her rising hopes died down, flickering faintly in a breast which rebelled against the extinguishing of those weak flames.

Then Josephine spoke again impetuously.

"Ah! I see you think Oliver is right. You approve of his choice; he is noble in your eyes."

Mary shook her head.

"I did not say so."

Josephine moved uneasily. Those circling lights were growing brighter round Mary's form. Now they made a cloud of filmy texture between the two women. Josephine supposed that through long weeping the nerves of her eyes were affected. She closed them, seeing still the same moving rays.

"What will you do, Mary?"

This time Josephine waited patiently for an answer, since she fancied that standing figure sought counsel of the far-reaching night influences. Possibly she drew inspiration from distant stars, shining like beacons of hope, or the soft moon rays mingling with the mysterious stillness in which Mary's ears alone might catch a small, soft voice.

Presently Mary spoke.

"Your desire to keep your son is reasonable enough. I do not blame you nor do I blame him, but the root of the trouble is very clear to me, you simply want to un-

derstand each other better. Perhaps when he talks the subject over with me, I may be able to throw quite a fresh light upon his point of view, one he has never seen before, a light that will make him obedient to your wishes and ashamed of the very desires which now elate his soul with pride."

A gasp of joy escaped Josephine.

"Mary," she cried, "if you can do this, I swear by a mother's love I shall never forget your goodness. I will do anything in the world to prove my gratitude. Your name shall be in my prayers till the day of my death, and if ever you want a friend, I will be more than that, I will be a mother—a sister, I will count you with my nearest and dearest on earth."

With a pang she remembered how Constance Eastlake's brilliant offers had all been rejected by this woman who would accept neither home nor money, preferring to work at Rutherwyke in the humble sphere of garden toil.

Mary drew nearer. She took Josephine's hands, and her touch had a soothing magnetism, a healing power.

"Try to be patient, try to believe in the good, ask for a quiet mind, seek consolation outside yourself," whispered the musical voice. "You have worn away your strength with fretting and tears, while to-morrow all may be well."

Josephine drew the speaker down and kissed her.

"Mary," she said, "I trust in you. For that reason I shall dry my tears and remember the service you did poor Constance, who hid from all outsiders the bitterness of her heart. I said to my husband that you could help us now, and while you are talking to Oliver, I shall be praying. Worldly woman that I am, from this hour my life for him shall be one perpetual prayer. I thought

to be a mother was a splendid joy, but you have made me realize a mother's cup is full of pain, and those who suffer pray more naturally than those who merely joy. Good-night, Mary. God bless you. To-morrow you will keep your promise and see Oliver."

Mary returned the kiss so gently that the touch of her lips was like a swift passing of gentle wind over the face of still waters. About her garments the fragrant scent of flowers clung, so pronounced that Josephine looked to see if she wore roses or lilies in her gown. The light was clear enough to reveal an unadorned robe, so Josephine concluded the exquisite odor came instead from a vase on a table near at hand. She watched the figure cross the room, gliding away like a silent spirit. Mary bent to raise her cloak, which still lay on the ground, and as she drew it round her the long folds mingled with the shadows.

"You can go out the same way, by the boudoir window," said Josephine. "It has been left open on purpose."

A murmured assent and the door closed. Once more Josephine was alone. She rose quickly, and turning up all the lights, rubbed her eyes as if she had been asleep. The past appeared so vision-like, she wanted to reassure herself the room was a reality. She touched the carved bedposts and once more gazed at herself in the mirror, which only a short time ago revealed such a careworn, haggard face. Now Josephine saw a new woman, bright with hope. All the unsightly crimson had faded from her eyes and she could look without repugnance at her image. Drawing a deep breath, she reared her head and squared her shoulders as if the effort helped to summon fresh control. Instinctively her heart lightened with a new sense of courage. She was no longer crushed by the

burden of her grief. She realized she could at last stand up to meet even a fresh blow without trembling. Her whole nature revived; she felt younger, stronger, more sure of her ground.

Arrow should see the change, she inwardly resolved. Now she would greet him with a smile on her lips. Men, of course, detested doleful women. Before dinner her fierce agitation had, she knew, preyed on the artist's peculiar temperament, giving him a kind of mental indigestion. Arrow unconsciously relied upon Josephine for smiles and sympathy. If he confided woes or failures she must listen and offer consolation. If he had triumphs to relate she must thrill with ecstasy, whatever sorrow dimmed her brain. To feel their positions reversed was a disturbing experience her husband inwardly resented. It sorely tried his temper, keeping him from her room in nervous dread of a coming storm. To-night he threw the odium of Josephine's distress entirely upon Oliver. For this reason his son appeared obnoxious in his eyes, and he avoided his society accordingly, fearful lest the subject of Labrador might once again be presented to him, an unsavory dish offending his fastidious nostrils.

"People who work," said the R.A. to himself, "should certainly not have children. It is doubtful if even they ought to marry."

Oliver, left alone, decided to wait until Mary should reappear from his mother's room. It seemed to him a long interview, and he felt half inclined to envy the unscrupulous nature of an eavesdropper as he hovered far off, listening for the opening of Josephine's door and her visitor's departure.

Of course they were talking of him. The angry

parent would hold up his mission to scorn before this stranger just as she had condemned it to Arrow.

But Mary, with those sacred eyes which held in their depths the beauty of a sinless soul, the Mary of the lilies, would surely understand him in a way his mother failed to do. Possibly she might soften Josephine and bring her to a better mind. Perhaps even to-night he would be called to his mother's side and blessed with words of repentance. "Son, forgive my worldly displeasure. Son, you must go about the Father's business."

He heard these tidings ringing in his brain, picturing a scene in which Josephine's pride lay humbled in the dust, while he magnanimously pardoned her past resentment, once more telling her of the great schemes that were to glorify his future.

Yes, Mary was just the woman to bring such a climax to pass—to turn a miserable evening of failure into glad forgiveness and mutual understanding between mother and son.

He heard Josephine's door open; Mary was nearing the side staircase which led to the boudoir. He moved away and ran nimbly down, concealing himself in the dainty little room, near the long French window.

As Mary entered he stepped boldly forward with a welcoming smile. The shaded electric light showed him tall and manly, well set up, undeniably good-looking in his faultless evening dress, a son of whom any woman might be proud.

"Forgive me for waylaying you like this," he said, "but if you can spare a moment, I should be so very glad to hear if you have succeeded in pacifying my mother. Of course she has confided her trouble to you. I am the victim of her displeasure. Bad luck, isn't it?"

The last words were uttered with an attempt to laugh

off an awkward situation. He closed the boudoir door, to hush the sound of voices, and his effort to conceal inward anxiety was so transparent that Mary smiled with the leniency of an elder person toward a child.

"It has done your mother good talking of her trouble to some one outside the family. Please forgive me for hearing your secret; I could not refuse to go to Mrs. Penreath. I dare say you felt a little hurt that a stranger was admitted to her confidence."

How well Mary read his thoughts. Her pleasant tone made Oliver feel he could forgive her anything, though he was not quite so sure he could forgive Josephine.

"My mother is very fussy," he declared, "and I am only too glad that you were there to let her talk and get the matter off her mind. Possibly by to-morrow she will be quite sensible again. I ought perhaps to have kept my plans to myself for a few days, but I pictured her sending off an impossible quantity of invitations to please a man whose only wish is to relinquish society and lead an utterly different kind of life."

He was trying to speak lightly, partly from nervousness, but chiefly because he was too shy to reveal all at once his eager expectations. He feared they might appear presumptuous in Mary's eyes coming from one so young, and he had all youth's horror of ridicule.

She watched him with her gentle gaze, reading deeply into his mind. As he waited for her to speak, she moved a little nearer, and her shadow fell across his own, the one merging in the other just where the moon's rays trembled, making a path of light for Mary.

"Your mother kept nothing back," said the soft voice without hesitation in a tone that made Oliver feel she had known him for years. "Mrs. Penreath told me all her hopes and fears. She described her joyful longing

for your return to-day and the agony of mind she suffered when you spoke of these new arrangements with Mr. Ireland. She asks me to believe that you intend now, at so early an age, to abandon your studies, give up your home, spurn the openly expressed desires of father and mother and follow a career of toil and trial in a distant country. She is sure—quite sure that this is the inexorable fate she must accept at your hands. She is prepared to break her heart over the blow. So, you see, women get strange fancies into their heads. Do tell me what you said to give her this impression?"

Mary turned large, inquiring eyes upon him, which unconsciously sent the blood rushing to his temples in a flood of shame. Evidently she suspected Josephine had arrived at a wrong conclusion and was waiting for Oliver to confirm the suspicion. For a moment he felt tongue-tied, then he was dimly conscious those same compelling eyes forced him to reply. With an effort he determined to make the case clear.

"My mother," he stammered, angry at his own confusion, "was quite right in what she said. I have work to do far afield, God's work, and if you are the good woman I take you to be, I fancy you will approve the choice I have made. You see, both my parents live very much for this world, and until I met Rye Ireland I never realized I had a vocation. Now I know the call has come, bidding me follow in the Master's steps, bidding me leave home and country to minister to souls in prison. Not the prison of bolts and bars, but a penal servitude of ice-bound desolation, where silence reigns and no voice speaks of peace, a land in which men think that possibly God Himself has forgotten their existence."

Mary listened sympathetically. She saw Oliver's face glow, watched him clench his fingers and catch a deep

breath at the conclusion of the hurried speech, as if to inhale power, and touch already, in elated thought, the laurels of a martyr's crown. It all seemed very pitiful to the one who watched with vivid comprehension and a heart of understanding.

"The call," said Mary, "is generally sent to those who are ready, if it comes from heaven direct. I think yours came to you through a human voice, a human suggestion, mistaken for a higher and more perfect demand. You would follow, I understand, in the Master's footsteps. This is your whole desire, is it not?"

Oliver flushed hotly beneath the words. They filled him with some vague misgiving he could not define.

"Yes," he replied, "most certainly. What do you mean by mistaking the call?"

Mary stirred slightly, and the movement caused her cloak to brush against his sleeve. The sudden contact warmed him like rays of fire when the chill of autumn's death is on the earth. It stirred his blood strangely, sending a tingling sensation through every vein. Quickly he turned to her, startled by the new wonder of these unexpected sensations. Unconsciously he gripped the cloak, holding its blue folds in his clenched fist as a drowning man might catch a rope thrown to him in the hour of raging tempest. It was no ordinary garment he held, but a part of Mary's personality, the visible sign of a substance creeping through the channels of his flesh to the startled fiber of the brain. It was a third presence standing between them weighed with some mighty influence. The warm fabric thrilled to his touch like a thing alive, and yet he knew it was but the hem of the garment Mary wore to protect her from the mists of night.

He pressed his question eagerly once again, and now

his voice shook, while his eyes fell beneath her piercing glance. As she opened her lips to speak Oliver dared not look into a face so pure, radiant and inspired, yet he dreaded her next remark and prevented her words with a quick interruption.

"You say I have mistaken the call. I do not understand you at all—in fact, I am quite at sea and should be glad of an explanation. I dare say I have much to learn, and women I know can help men—women like you. Tell me what you mean. I only want to listen and be guided by your wisdom."

He asked himself inwardly: "How did he know she was wise? Were they not strangers still, together for the first time alone?" Yet to Oliver the wisdom of all the ages shone in that beautiful face. The wisdom of goodness, the knowledge of right, the temple of a great gift given to the daughters of the world—instinct.

Mary did not draw her cloak away, though she saw him press it to his heart, which beat fiercely for the explanation only her lips could give.

CHAPTER XIX

THIRTY SILENT YEARS

"BY mistaking the call," replied Mary, "I meant that Mr. Ireland said, 'Come,' and not the Master."

It was an astounding statement to fall so calmly from her lips. It robbed Oliver of breath and made him fear for her as for one who has blasphemed.

"How can you know?" he asked, and despite his admiration, despite the power of her mysterious influence, he was offended.

"To follow in the footsteps of the Man of Sorrows," murmured Mary gently, "you must think of His life."

Oliver raised his head proudly.

"Exactly. It is of that I am always thinking—the life of self-abnegation, serving others, going from place to place preaching to the poor and ignorant, succoring them in sickness, comforting them in sorrow and drinking the cup of sacrifice because it is the Father's will."

"The life which commenced at thirty," broke in Mary with a clear ring in her voice like the chiming of the Gabriel bell; "the life which needed all those long years of quiet, thoughtful preparation, when the King of kings remained in subjection to His parents, under their rule, working at a poor man's trade. In silent obedience He waited until the time should be accomplished to go forth on His ministry. Have you ever thought of His

long restraint, His example of humility? Could the Mother who loved Him have borne the agony of the Passion but for those years given so willingly first to her and to the home? She had that store of happiness to draw upon when the iron entered her soul. She was saved by those years, those blessed years of which the world knows nothing."

Oliver looked at Mary with startled eyes.

"You speak as if you knew," he said, and a cold chill crept through his veins.

"I know," she answered, "that in these days of rush and hurry people often mistake zeal for holiness and crowd out the life of worship. They do not sufficiently prepare for any great work. They utterly ignore this side of their Lord's earthly sojourn, and therefore lose sight of its example. He, the Almighty, thought it necessary to accept humble service until He 'began to be about thirty years of age.' What patient self-suppression, what a lifetime of prayer to train the heart for those few full years of divine labor! Do you not think the devils could have been subject to Him sooner? But there was a time to learn and a time to teach." (Mary spoke in a tone of authority.) "The Master bids you know Him better and follow His example of restraint." (Her words came with the power of a direct message.) "You are but eighteen and you would attempt the task of experienced men, attempt it only to fail. There are mission fields at your very door, yet you wilfully blind yourself because you do not wish to see. You want a romance, you want a story, you are carried off your feet by words that stir the imagination and fill your heart with pride. There is vainglory in your longing. Your thirst for adventure is greater than your thirst for the souls of men. Look into your heart.

Did you not know yourself to-day, when your mother's tears fell? Did you still think you had a hero's nature? Did you still believe you were acting in accordance with your Master's will? What is right for one is wrong for another. The work you desire is right for strong, experienced men; it is right for Rye Ireland. I have heard much of his father, and unless the son were well fitted for such a vocation, he would never let him become a missionary. It is wrong for you, because you have another place to fill. You will be shown the way, you will be given the power of renunciation if you ask for guidance and humble yourself to accept the harder task. When you go back to your studies, try instead to influence those around you by quiet example. Oh! there will be so much to do, you will wonder you found time to think of leaving England. Here at Rutherwyke I could name a dozen cases that might employ your time. You could help me——"

She broke off, for his face, which had expressed various stages of surprise, annoyance, wonder and resentment, softened suddenly.

"I—I could help you!"

The words held some balm to soothe his troubled mind, for as Mary laid bare before him all the weak points of his boasted energy he realized that she spoke truly. He saw his own soul in a fresh and strangely unflattering light. The word "vainglory" pierced him like a sword as it fell from her lips. He stood condemned, discovered by an eye searching beneath the surface. She had told him to look into his heart, and he obeyed with fear and trembling, knowing well he could not be called a strong man, hampered by youth's inexperience. When she spoke of the thirty years' preparation, those silent years at Nazareth branded Oliver as a presumptuous,

hot-headed child of impulse. The restraint of that most marvelous figure in history appeared in the strong light of example. Mary's words painted the Man-God in all His wondrous humility and abnegation, calling upon Oliver to accept the lesson of a hidden life. How could such arguments be answered, spoken by Mary of the lilies, the woman with a saint's face and eyes of holy fire?

"Yes," she retorted as Oliver echoed her words, "even at Rutherwyke there are souls in prison."

The young man bowed his head.

"You don't know what you ask me to give up. You can't realize what it means to me to put all my dreams behind and relinquish my ambitions."

Mary sighed, and the gentle stir of her body seemed to Oliver an unspoken tribute of sympathy for the struggle he endured and the resignation she called upon him to make.

"Only dreams," she whispered, "there you are right. Dreams of work to be handled by those of maturer years, dreams you may yet fulfil when your heart is ready. Go when your mother's blessing can follow you, go when you are prepared. You were indeed walking in your sleep; only now you are awake and can see clearly."

She moved nearer the window. He could not bear for her to leave, though he considered she had treated him with cruel candor. Also he wondered she did not ask for his decision, noting she took for granted he would follow her advice, given with such a wealth of spontaneous conviction.

"Stay," he said quickly, "talk to me, lecture me, say anything you like—only don't go. I have a queer feeling that you are the living embodiment of truth, and however bitter the truth may prove, it must fall from

your lips as naturally as the rain falls from heaven. I see I am a very poor creature in your eyes, and you make me believe, against my own will, that your judgment is right. No one else could have torn away the veil. Mother tried and failed disastrously. I cannot tell you the anger she roused in my heart. Rye Ireland shall be warned he was mistaken in me. I will write and repeat your words. I will say my Lady of the Lilies (I must call you that) finds me unworthy of all our grand ambitions. It is a difficult confession to make; it is hard to realize I was governed and led by a spirit of romance, a wretched seeking after adventure for which my parents were to suffer. Poor mother, how completely she broke down to-night! My father, too, he was hard as a rock, and, oh! so sarcastic. If you could only have heard him at dinner! Perhaps you know how he can wither up a fellow when he likes."

Oliver successfully barred the exit with his figure. He had grown so excited he would have talked long into the night had Mary listened. But it was evident she intended ending the interview, for she raised her hand to wave him aside.

"Please let me go," she begged with her sweet smile. "To-morrow we shall meet again, and then we can join hands in some work nearer home. I could not help saying what I felt, and it is very good of you not to be angry at my plain speaking. I hope we are still friends."

He caught both her wrists violently and stammered the word "friends" in a voice shaking with emotion.

What a young impressionable eighteen-year-old heart! Mary could almost have wept at the tragedy of youth. A man's form and a child's nature thrust upon a crafty world to battle with old souls, ready to prey on

the credulous and weak. All her instincts of motherly protection rose to the surface, a great tender flood of pure understanding. Yet she drew away firmly, knowing it was better now that Oliver should be alone.

"Good-night," she said, stepping out into the moonlight.

He followed without hesitation.

"I am coming to see you home. I always take a stroll after dinner."

Mary held up a protesting hand.

"I prefer to walk by myself; I would rather be alone. Please don't think me unkind."

She gave no explanation for this preference, made no excuse for desiring solitude, and Oliver felt compelled to respect her wish, though his face denoted keen disappointment.

"Of course if you prefer——"

The sentence died unfinished on his lips, in a lingering hope Mary might relent, and even as he hesitated, the cloaked form vanished among the shadows and was seen no more.

"Which way had she gone?"

He asked himself the question in sudden perplexity, looking from left to right, then turning back to the house, entered with head bent and hands clenched. He made no effort to analyze his feelings, but mounted the stairs to his room and went straight to a writing-table. Taking pen and paper, he hastily addressed an envelope to Rye Ireland.

This done, he paused until his thoughts began to flow, when once again he took up his pen and wrote with speed:

"My Dear Brother"—for some time it had pleased them to use this term, though now the word rang a little false and jarred on Oliver's nerves—"I promised to write at once, giving you the full details of my home-coming. Here I am, back at Rutherwyke, and since we parted, only this morning, there is much to tell. First and foremost, I have made a friend. You will say in such a short time it is impossible to call a new acquaintance 'friend,' but I assure you I have met with no ordinary soul. I do not hesitate to say she is a living, breathing saint, a woman with the face of a Madonna, eyes that are absolutely true and a voice of real music—not the music which ripples and laughs, but the thrilling tones of some grand cathedral choir or a heavenly instrument reaching to earth for the good of mankind. I saw her first on my arrival, just where the lilies grow. She looked so absolutely spiritual that I half believed she was an angel. To-night we met again and spoke of many things. She had been trying to comfort my mother, who was crying as if her heart would break because I had told her I must answer the call to foreign lands which I thought I had received from heaven. But this stranger, this Madonna-like Mary, showed me myself. She spoke of the years of preparation at Nazareth, when our Lord remained in subjection to His parents, and pointed me to Him as an example, saying it was my distinct duty to stay here in obedience to my parents' wishes. Her words burned into my heart like fire; you cannot imagine the effect they had upon me. I turned hot and cold; I writhed beneath their candor, and knowing they were the wounds of a friend, I almost welcomed the pain. I could have cried aloud with anguish, but my brain forced me to listen. Her spirit was a mighty power, overwhelming me, crushing my egoism,

changing me into a new being, a being who despised the old, untried self. If I were to go away with you now on this mission, Rye, her eyes would follow me with their big reproach, her tongue would cry: 'Where is your mother's blessing? What have you done with her tears?' This woman who influences me so mightily, this stranger, declares emphatically my work would fail. She holds persistently to the fact that lack of experience is an obstacle, that I am offering weakness where strength is required, youth and ignorance in place of matured service. She bids me wait; she holds me back. I am as a child in her hands. I cannot pretend to argue when her eyes are upon me. If only you could see and hear her, you would understand. I swear it is not merely the beauty of her face which moves me, though she is the grandest woman on God's earth. In a sacred picture at which my father is now working he hopes to immortalize her as the Virgin Mary. While I write I see in imagination every radiant feature, the tone of her skin so rare and pure, the exquisite softness of the hair upon her brow. But the hour is late, and all this may only weary you. Were I to write all night, I could not express one-half of her glorious womanhood. She bears a name both sacred and sweet; she is called 'Mary.' So, my dear brother, you will see I have taken her words to heart; I have decided to act upon them. At present I must stay at Rutherwyke, and she will lead me to a better understanding of the truths I had presumptuously considered myself fitted to teach. I only stay to learn, hoping for improvement. I shall pray for you and your grand schemes; the mission will be ever in my mind. We can still remain brothers, can we not? How I shall think of you, far away, leading the life I so desired, doing the work we talked of together, sometimes

remembering, perhaps, the one who drew back. In the future you may possibly meet this woman who has altered my fate, and knowing her, you will forgive all and understand all."

Here he thanked his friend for much kindness received, and with many expressions of warm regard, signed the letter:

"Your devoted comrade,

"OLIVER PENREATH."

Just as his trembling hand sealed the missive beneath a mass of burning wax the door opened softly and Josephine stole in. She wore a loose silk dressing-gown of pale coloring, and the delicate lace about her throat gave her face a strangely fragile appearance. She came quickly forward, putting her arms about her boy.

"I could not sleep without kissing you," she whispered in a broken voice.

She did not know he had seen Mary nor did she intend to mention the painful subject risen barrier-like between them.

He drew her head down, pressing the quivering lips to his own with a fervor that filled her with surprise.

"Mother," he whispered, "can you forgive me?"

She looked at Oliver with startled eyes, her slight frame trembling violently. Surely his words held contrition and the softened tone suggested a possible compromise.

"You know, dear," he added, "we cannot always see as we are seen, and I was very blind to-day. I fear I hurt you terribly; I think I hurt father too. Then Mary came. I watched for her in the boudoir and we spoke of this mission. Don't ask me to repeat what she said, mother. I had hoped just now to write some of it

to Rye Ireland, but my pen refused, and I made a hideous failure of the attempt. I could only tell him my plans were changed and that, after all, he must go away alone. I mentioned I had made a friend and that her words were responsible for my decision."

A cry of joy escaped Josephine, the cry of a soul released from torment. The sound smote Oliver's ears like a blow, revealing to him the depth of suffering he had inflicted.

Closer and closer he held her, whispering penitently:

"Mother—little mother, I am sorry, so sorry."

Josephine, feeling the tender embrace, hearing the soft words, felt her dead heart glow with sudden resurrection.

Once more Oliver was all her own. The past seemed like an evil dream in this hour of renewed love and understanding. Softly she wept on his shoulder, tears of voiceless relief.

At last she spoke, calmed by the soothing touch of his hand and the pressure of his cheek against her own.

"We will try to live together the life you had planned for yourself abroad, Oliver. We will teach each other the work of service. It will be easy if we are willing to learn, and perhaps Mary will help us."

She realized dimly that Mary was a tower of strength, and turned to this strong fortress, fearful lest the news should prove too good to last.

"Yes, Mary will help us," he echoed, and the pain vanished from his voice, while a strangely tender note sounded the warning of sentiments so deep and strong that Josephine wondered at their passionate intensity.

"I may tell Arrow?" she whispered. "He too will be glad."

"Oh! yes, if you think father cares."

"I know he cares. You must not always be guided by his outward appearance or manner. He has very deep affections, but sometimes I think he does not like to show them."

Oliver did not reply.

"I have noticed," continued Josephine, "that in many ways he has been kinder and more considerate since he began this new picture. He has given generously to charities and seems upset if any one is spoken ill of. As usual, of course, he is engrossed in his work, but we must expect that. Every one has to pay for their laurels, and Arrow's are bought by long days of labor and the concentration demanded by art."

Oliver was thinking of those hours his father spent in the studio with Mary. How splendid to study all that was wonderful and fair in that speaking face, to gaze enraptured at its every line in the solitude of a silent room. For the first time he envied Arrow his art, and a burning desire possessed him to see the painting of Mary.

He replied vaguely to his mother's words. Probably the creating of sacred subjects inspired holy thoughts and the atmosphere in which his father worked would be conducive to charitable deeds.

He felt glad when Josephine gave him her final kiss and left with a happy smile which brought back her girlish charm.

Impatiently he waited until her footsteps died away, then stamping his letter, went softly into the corridor, turning down a staircase leading to Arrow's studio. As he neared the door he could see a light in the room. All his recent fear of his father faded before a deep anxiety to see the pictured Mary. He entered without knocking and walked straight to the large canvas.

Arrow was seated in a chair not far from the models' platform, apparently engrossed in the contemplation of his work. Oliver said nothing, paid no heed to the silent figure, but simply stood transfixed, gazing at the Madonna's face. He fancied it must actually be Mary Aquila returned from wandering in the garden, to take up her abode in that peaceful studio. Noting his son's absorption, Arrow felt relieved, for he had no wish to return to unpleasant subjects and gladly observed how deeply the painting appeared to impress and move his youthful critic.

"You like it?" queried the artist, trying to conceal a note of excitement in his voice. "I think it lives, I believe it speaks, and that is half the battle. She is here, is she not, Oliver? If we never saw her again, she would be with us always."

The words had a strange effect upon the younger man. Suddenly his father was nearer to him than ever in the past; their thoughts merged in one harmonious flow of eager admiration.

"You have never done so well," said the boy simply, "but then you have never had such a subject, father. You must know that by now. This is more than a picture, it is Mary whispering to the soul—Mary beautiful, majestic, simple, entreating. The eyes move, the lips plead, the face is alive. You have grasped her spirit, you have caught all the fine feeling, the noble impulses! She has evidently held nothing back which could help and inspire, she has given her true self to the work. What an education to be near such a woman! Oh! I envy you, father. I ought not to wonder at your triumph. But it takes my breath away to see such splendid success and to share in it here with you. I am proud,

terribly proud and glad. I never knew you were so great."

He turned impetuously to grasp his father's hand. The artist smiled. Oliver's words were absolutely genuine and their enthusiasm could not fail to please.

"I am glad you are satisfied," said Arrow, "but, as you observe, I was helped. We have an extraordinary woman at Rutherwyke, and it seems you have guessed this already, since you saw her at the cottage this afternoon. We must make the most of her while she is with us; it may not be for long."

The boy started.

"You—you don't really think she will go?" questioned Oliver in a voice of obvious alarm. "She seemed contented enough; the cottage looked so sweet and homelike. Surely she cannot want to leave it yet?"

To the older man the boy was childishly transparent as he stammered out these words, his color deepening as he spoke. But his father gave him cold comfort.

"I am quite sure she will leave us. I have known it for some time."

The answer came without a moment's hesitation, falling like lead on Oliver's heart.

"Why, father, why? Is she not happy here?"

Already he was inwardly forming plans which might induce Miss Aquila to remain. Perhaps it was a matter of money, and he could persuade his parents to offer her a more tempting salary, possibly she had some grievance that could easily be rectified. Instinctively he thought of the garden's life and the triumph of the lilies. She must have used magic to induce so brave a show of blossom, the magic of work well done, of care, talent, discretion.

"I do not think it is a matter of happiness," replied Arrow after a pause.

"Then what other reason could there be? Try and think, father. You must have some idea, you who see her so often."

"I cannot pretend to say. It is a mystery, my boy. Though she looks quite calm and peaceful, at heart she must be restless. She is always moving from place to place. I dare not hope she will remain long with us."

Arrow sighed and Oliver caught a world of sadness in the sound.

"Even if she goes, we could see her still," persisted the anxious voice. "There are some people one must never lose sight of, don't you agree with me, father? Surely she will always remember us, because of you and this great work. All the world will be talking of your picture, then perhaps the public may discover Mary Aquila, and her name will be associated with Rutherwyke until we are dead and forgotten."

It was a glad fancy, thrilling Oliver with hope for the future.

Arrow listened without comment; he had his own ideas about Mary, but was willing to draw his son into further conversation. They talked of her beauty as she stood pictured before them in the blue gown; they talked of the painting's merits and its lesson to men, and the subject proved so congenial, it was not until Oliver found himself once again alone in his room that he remembered he had never told Arrow his change of plans.

"He will hear it from mother," said the now tired traveler as he sought his old familiar bed, which looked so home-like and inviting after the long, disquieting day.

As Oliver closed his eyes he thought of his father's

work with quite a new pride, strong, deep, grateful. He thought, too, of Mary and her influence on his life, wondering what Rye Ireland would say when he received the letter. Then came a dreamy sensation of not caring very deeply. Mary, Arrow and the so-called brother faded before sleep's conquering claim, and Oliver's eyes closed.

He had no dreams that night, but when he woke the first word he uttered in sweet contemplation was the name "Mary."

CHAPTER XX

CHERCHEZ LA FEMME

MRS. CRAY was returning from her son's grave, where she kept a small tin cross filled with cottage flowers. As she walked back alone from the cemetery, down the main street of Abbotts Brooke, Mrs. Jones joined her with a welcoming smile.

"How well you are looking!" said the widow, taking the hand stretched out to her in friendly greeting.

The wrinkled face hardly suggested rude health, but the woman's eyes were less heavy than of yore, while her whole expression appeared brighter and more alert. It was evident for some time past that a strange change for the better had come over Mrs. Jones.

"Not the same woman, Mrs. Cray—not the same woman," she declared emphatically. "The Lord has done great things for me. I am a new creature, thanks be to God! You see, it is Miss Aquila's desire that I should give Him all the praise, and I would be sadly ungrateful if I did not respect her wishes. She's a real lady, and more than that, she's a saint, if ever any one deserved the name."

Mrs. Cray nodded assent.

"Ah! indeed," she murmured, "a saint on earth."

She spoke in tremulous accents, waiting for Mrs. Jones to continue.

"You mind the day I cut the piece out of her cloak?

She was dressed—same as always—in that beautiful rich color."

There was a pause, both women stared at each other as if paralyzed at the recollection.

"Yes, it was just after my loss," answered Mrs. Cray in a whisper.

Despite the empty street, a certain fear of listening ears possessed them both. Mrs. Jones' features were twitching violently with nervous spasms, brought on by the inward emotion of her thoughts. Then she spoke in a tone of deep conviction.

"That day proved a turning point. I felt my blue lady meant well by me when she said as how the little hole in her cloak did not matter, and that I had better sleep on it, as maybe it would bring pleasant dreams. That piece of stuff (and rare good material it is) has never left me night or day since. To some it would seem strange, but the very first night I got a deal of comfort and repose. All my worries and troubles faded away, and I dropped off like an infant, me as never slept two five minutes together without a break. The people declare I cured myself, but I warrant some one else took my case in hand—we won't mention who, seeing as she is so mighty particular not to be praised."

Mrs. Cray showed no sign of discrediting the statement as she replied:

"If it were not for my own experience, I might echo the rest. I don't mind confessing to you that Miss Aquila saved my reason after my poor lad's death. She brought me back to myself. She gave me courage to face the world, for I was near on the borders of madness the night he was buried. Ever since she has stood my friend and visited me regular one evening a week. Though she only stays a short time, it does me more

good than all the medicine. It is wonderful how far afield she gets at night, when her day's work is done, looking in on sick folk, to take them comforts and speak kind words. Maybe you have seen her at your door, Mrs. Jones, and that she gave you something else to build your strength on, besides a little square piece of blue material, taken without a by-your-leave, as I well remember."

Mrs. Jones looked confused. It had always been held up as a reproach that she was responsible for spoiling the good lady's cloak.

"That's my business, Mrs. Cray," she answered. "Some like to hear tell of their charity, while others ask, as a favor, that you'll let the matter pass without a word, but if anything would make me think Miss Aquila was a real angel, it is the change in Mrs. Benn."

Both women nodded simultaneously in mutual appreciation of the sentiment.

"Ah! the change in Mrs. Benn."

The widow spoke slowly, a mysterious expression in her eyes.

"What do you make of it, Mrs. Jones? I understand, being a reformed character, she is quite a friend of yours now, brings the boy to see you and all that, though I hear he still sleeps up at the White Cottage along of Miss Aquila."

Mrs. Jones was nearing her gate, and now she walked more slowly, as if to gain time, thinking of the link of sympathy between herself and Mrs. Benn since the day when Sam's mother first crossed her threshold—to talk of Mary.

"Well," she admitted, "maybe I do see a bit of Mrs. Benn one way and another. She drops in after her day's work, just to tell me about her lady and what a

deal is made of little Sam. I fairly wonder he isn't spoiled, but there! the boy would do anything in the world for his mother and Miss Mary. In fact, he grows better and better every day, till Mrs. Benn gets really frightened to see him so good, says it ain't natural in so young a child. I nearly told her too as it wasn't quite natural either for a woman who had led the life of a hopeless drunkard to pass the Lion's Claw twice a day and never so much as want to look in. But there! I said at first, and I repeat it again now, same as that afternoon when you were showing the cloak, 'It's nothing of earth that does it, nothing of this world.' You should hear Mr. Vines on the subject; he, too, has a wonderful opinion of Miss Aquila. But, as I warned Mrs. Benn and I caution you also, why say what we know, just to be called soft? Mrs. Vines let on about it being Miss Aquila's doing that Monk got another place. But for her he would have gone to the bad altogether, they say. Naturally, we don't hear one-half, and it's my belief she is doing good all the time. She just likes to work for others and get no thanks."

Mrs. Cray warmly agreed, racking her own brain for some return news. She had no intention of letting Mrs. Jones do all the talking.

"I was fairly honored yesterday," declared the widow at last. "Young Mr. Penreath called himself to see me. He spoke so beautifully about my poor boy that after he left I cried for two hours on end. Oh! I did take it kind! He's just as nice a gentleman as ever I saw and is going to start a church lads' brigade at Abbotts Brooke. The boys are wild to join, seeing they'll have uniforms."

Having proudly delivered this piece of information, Mrs. Cray held out a farewell hand, and taking a last

glance up the street in the direction of the distant cemetery, passed on, leaving Mrs. Jones lingering by her gate, still pensive with thoughts of Mary. It was often at this twilight hour the lady gardener might be seen in the quiet street, bent upon some errand of kindness. The children knew her well, and the sight of her blue dress in the distance would be the signal for tiny feet to toddle instantly in her direction. Often Sam walked at her side, a bright, smiling boy wearing a white suit, so utterly different to the unhappy child known once as "Benn's brat" of village ill fame.

But this evening, though Mrs. Jones waited hopefully, no sign of Miss Aquila brightened the deserted street. Some important work on the picture had made it impossible for Arrow to spare her from the studio until the last remnant of daylight died. Then, suddenly realizing how many hours she had stood patiently without owning to fatigue, he refused to let her leave without some refreshment.

"You are just going to sit there and not move until you have had tea," he said, gently forcing her into a large easy chair by the open window. "I know I am a perfect tyrant keeping you standing so long, but the work to-day was very difficult. You see, every detail must express yourself, solely and entirely. Nobody else could possibly pose for any part of the figure. The hands, which I have greatly improved this afternoon, are absolutely individual. They convey much, they are full of passionate protest; they plead like the lips and almost tremble. The attitude suggests also prayerful sorrow, combined with agonized tension. Yesterday I was dissatisfied, I had not done full justice to their powers of expression. Oddly enough, my boy made me see where I failed. He said: 'Those hands are not

beautiful enough for Mary. Can't you idealize them, father?' I saw at once what he meant, and I told him simply: 'Her hands are not earth-made hands at all.' "

Mary looked down at her peculiarly transparent fingers.

"They are good for garden work," she said, smiling.

"Too good," he added quickly, "far too good."

For a moment the recollection that she lived a life of toil annoyed him. Often as she stood to him through the long hours he marveled at her endurance. How strong she must be never to murmur or how patient and enduring! Was she, after all, just what she would have them believe—a daughter of the people? Did she owe this fortitude to sound peasant blood? Arrow considered the mere idea preposterous. He longed to know the history of her past. From whence had she borrowed her quiet dignity of manner, that grace unconsciously mated to an air of majesty, difficult to conceal? In her he found the very attributes looked for in the Madonna: the simplicity of the low-born maid and the queenship of divine radiance. Purity, lowliness, power, supremacy —all mingled in one true heart.

Now he gazed at her intently as she rested in the chair.

"My wife and Oliver have gone to London," he said, "and will not be back till late. Poor Josephine is trying to interest herself in the East End; they are visiting a settlement. She is ready to do anything if the boy will only stay in England, and she never ceases praising you for the good influence you exercised over him. Josephine is quite a pathetic figure in her maternal efforts to please. Only last night she sat up late, making out exactly what would have been spent on a big ball we had decided to give here, and the amount is to be handed

instead to this mission they are inspecting to-day. It was Oliver's suggestion."

Tea appeared as he spoke, and Arrow had the tray placed beside Miss Aquila. He felt no grudge against the mission which drew his wife and son to London, for this quiet hour of leisure with Mary was an unexpected delight.

"Poor little Sam will be expecting me," she said.

The artist frowned. Were these precious moments to be snatched from him by Mrs. Benn's child?

"He has his mother at the cottage," came the quick retort.

Mary could not deny this fact, yet more than once her eyes wandered longingly toward her little home.

"Mrs. Benn stays, I suppose, till the child goes to bed," continued Arrow, observing the glance impatiently.

"Yes, sometimes she sits by him all the evening. I have known her stay till ten o'clock."

"Oh! then you need not worry. I suppose she is quite a reformed character?"

He asked the question conventionally, and his palpable lack of interest did not escape Mary.

"Quite," she echoed, handing him the tea he had asked her to pour out.

"And you think the improvement will last?"

Mary's face expressed not only hope but conviction.

"I am quite sure it will last."

There was a pause. Arrow had been making conversation in an effort to detain her. He knew her habit of moving to the door and then suddenly disappearing without a word. This often occurred just as his lips opened to voice an idea or ask a question, but pride never permitted him to follow the retreating figure.

While he worked the Mary of his inspiration was everything he could desire, but the moment he laid down his brush she became all eagerness to fly back to her garden toil or the child watching for her on the cottage porch.

"By the way," he said, "what is the matter with Vines?"

Mary looked up surprised.

"Is he ill?" she asked.

Arrow saw he had arrested her attention.

"Oh! I don't say exactly ill, but I think he has got nerves or something of the kind. Now, this morning I happened to come up behind him suddenly before breakfast. I felt sure he heard me, for he stopped watering the border and stood as if listening in an attitude of tension. Then, when I was almost on a line with his shoulder, he started aside with a sharp cry and fell against a tree. His face had blanched to the very lips, there were large drops of perspiration on his forehead, and for a moment he stared at me stupidly; I really thought he had gone mad. Directly I spoke he pulled himself together, tried to apologize and muttered something about footsteps following him on the gravel. I was rather annoyed at the feeble explanation and wondered if he had told the truth or was trying to put me off with a very lame excuse."

As Mary listened her eyes were full of understanding.

"He certainly is nervous," she said. "He has often complained to me about those same footsteps. He imagines he hears them behind him and that the garden is haunted. He really confessed as much to me only the other day."

Arrow laughed aloud.

"Vines is the last man I should have suspected of such

a foolish idea. It really looks as if he were in for some brain trouble. I shall make him see a doctor. Since the spring he has become dreadfully thin and looks very run down. He used to be quite a handsome fellow, but I thought this morning he appeared a wreck of his former self. He works well, I notice, and seems to take an interest in the place. I have never had any cause to complain of him before."

As Arrow spoke Mary was looking at the beautiful Rutherwyke gardens, the monastic ground reminiscent of so many century-old histories. The view from the studio, now the blinds were raised, made an imposing landscape of pasture, distant hills and lavish foliage. The fading light chased the shadows in long forks of flittering amber across a field where thirsty animals wandered to a wide pool, in which the red of the sunlight cast its ruby reflection. Knee deep in the refreshing pool stood wading cattle, cool, content, placid, while a Shetland pony hurried to join his more ponderous companions in the shallow water. Presently Mary spoke:

"Vines has never been the same since Monk left. His wife said so only the last time I saw her. The poor little woman seems very worried about his health. He became depressed and made up his mind Monk would commit suicide. Hettie Vines declares her husband is not an easy man to understand, for it was after Monk had been proved a defaulter that this sudden devotion developed. It may have arisen from pity, it may have arisen from other causes."

The final words were spoken so low Mary apparently addressed them to herself as the expression of some inward thought.

Arrow disliked any mention of Monk, but for the

moment the subject rose so naturally he could not evade it without seeming abrupt.

"Well, all that business," he said, "was very unpleasant. It quite upset me at the time, yet you see it was the ill wind which blew us a great good. But for a trying revelation of dishonesty, the picture of Mary would never have risen to preach its lesson to the world. Fate sent you purposely to Rutherwyke, so after all I ought to be grateful to Monk. He made a hard fight for it, he was very sure about his innocence. His dogged defiance proved harrowing in the extreme. Josephine was miserable."

Arrow thought again of that morning in his study, when for the last time he told Monk not to try and justify himself, but to leave the place as quickly as possible—without a character. Here in the quiet studio, under the light of Mary's gaze and beneath the glory of that splendid canvas, the remembered words appeared oddly cold and inhuman. Now, as he spoke of the erring gardener, Mary might have been a gracious advocate of mercy, the Virgin materialized to plead for the souls of men, so sad was her face, so sweet the wide pity in her eyes. They brought some Latin phrases of devotion to his mind, ever receptive for new sensations. He wished he could have written them under the picture as he murmured to himself their rough translation:

"Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy. Hail, our life, our sweetness, our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears."

His thoughts were far away from material surroundings as they strove to recall Cranmer's smooth translation of a lovely string of Latin, concluding with a death-

less plea to the heavenly mother: "Show us the fruit of thy womb, Jesus."

The studio seemed to Arrow suddenly like a place of worship, so holy was the woman's form beside the picture of the Madonna. This room became a Ladye Chapel, with Mary as the morning star, Mary the Ladye of Grace, presiding over a shrine of mystic rites and sainted forms.

Dim rays of fading day took the character of tapers round the blue-gowned figure. He fancied he could see tongues of flame burning with a waxen light. His ears caught in fancy droning voices from a world of dreams, voices which chanted penitential psalms and filled the atmosphere with a liturgical spirit. As he listened his imaginative ear was soothed with surrounding harmonies in various modulations, sharp contrasts of light and shade, keys too accurate to jar, too amazing for reality.

He wondered vaguely as he followed these rapturous creations of his overtired brain if he were worthy to breathe the same atmosphere as the woman who had inspired his latest work. He knew his painting was one of masterly power, nobly conceived, a type of mysterious and profound womanhood, merging into divinity. He recalled how in early times none were permitted to paint holy and venerable images who came under the anathema of the Church. Art was sanctified and elevated to a holy calling. Vassari said of Beato Angelico: "Che fa cose di Cristo, con Cristo deve sempre stare." He would paint his Christ on his knees. This artist never used models and received holy communion before venturing to depict the purity of the Virgin. Arrow instinctively contrasted this spirit of reverence with Andrea del Sarto, whose religious pictures portrayed the handsome but vulgar features of his wife.

A host of similar and more flagrant impieties came quickly on the heels of memory.

To his picture Arrow acknowledged he had given a heart of reverence. He had turned his mind to the task, striving to reverently express that fount of maternal love, gentleness and simplicity.

Mary, seeing him engrossed in silent contemplation, respected the mood and sat with folded hands until he should speak again. With an effort he shook off the enchantment of his waking dreams and recalled the subject of their conversation.

"I often wonder," he said, "if I shall ever see the fellow again."

Mary knew to whom he alluded and her eyes met Arrow's with their somewhat disconcerting candor as she replied:

"I feel convinced you will see him, and probably before very long."

"Why, prophetess?" laughed the master who had dismissed Monk.

"Well, he was an old servant and loved the place dearly. However harshly you treated him, he will never be content to drift entirely out of your life, and he will not be happy until he has proved his innocence."

Arrow sighed deeply.

"I fear he cannot do that; I wish it were possible. I hate to feel a man like Monk could abuse my trust for years, when I had always treated him well. You see, I have no time to look into accounts or watch my money like some people. I rely on the honesty of those who serve me, and until this occurred, I fancy my record justified the confidence."

Mary's face wore a strangely sad expression. Perhaps she was thinking of the evening when Monk came

to the White Cottage, his features drawn with mental suffering, his soul lacerated and sore through wounds received.

"How did you first discover he was an unfaithful steward?" she asked.

Arrow moved uneasily in his chair. He would like to have brushed the subject aside but for Mary's compelling eyes. They were fixed on him now with all their terrible magnetism of inquiry.

"Oh! the first warning seemed, at the time, rather ridiculous, only it proved so disastrously correct. It arrived in the form of an anonymous letter, bearing a London postmark."

Mary leaned forward, and her breath came a little faster.

"Then Monk had an enemy," she declared with emphasis.

"Or I had a friend," replied Arrow quickly.

"But anonymous letters are so wicked," answered Mary in a troubled voice. "Often they cause the innocent to suffer for the guilty."

Arrow moved his head in slow, grudging consent. He disliked the memory of that letter exceedingly.

"The writer," he continued, "proved a veritable Jonah to our amicable arrangements with Monk. He or she (it looked like a masculine fist) bade us keep an eye on our orchids, declaring some valuable specimens had been sold from the Rutherwyke conservatories. I remember the exact words: 'Your head gardener, a man named Monk, offered them to my gardener, but I instructed him not to buy, knowing you did not sell. I am writing anonymously for a very good reason, and should strongly advise you to watch and see if any of your treasured specimens disappear.' I hardly took it seri-

ously, and at any rate would not play the spy, but went straight to headquarters and sifted the matter at once. I found, to my surprise, that the chief orchid house was minus some of our most rare specimens, valued at large sums of money. I must say Monk proved a splendid actor. His surprise was so well feigned that at first I was almost deceived. He swore a robbery had been committed in the night and that only the previous evening the missing plants were in their accustomed places. But the lie hardly held water a moment before the bubble burst. It was evident, from inquiries made, Monk had been the last to leave the orchid house, locking the door and taking the key home. The anonymous letter came by an early post, so it was clear he and I were the first to enter that morning. No one could have broken in, the lock being perfect and the glass uninjured. Not the smallest sign of disturbance carried out his theory of an unknown thief. Evidence of a further compromising nature followed. Figures had been altered in his books months back, but he seemed dazed and could not remember any details of the occurrence. He pretended he had accidentally made a wrong calculation, declaring he was never too good at figures, but he could not possibly have thought at the time the accounts tallied. I don't know why I am repeating all this. The whole history is so distasteful to me that I should be glad never to mention Monk's name again."

Instinctively Arrow shrank from the painful side of life. He had never indulged a morbid temperament. Even when conceiving a subject-picture of dramatic intensity, it had always been his endeavor to obliterate the faintest suggestion of anything sordid. All his imaginative impulses swayed toward finer emotions. Greed of gold and the petty deception of financial fraud ap-

peared so low and incomprehensible that their intrusion clouded the fine edge of inspiration. He only wanted to forget the episode of Monk's departure, surrounded by its ugly mystery of unacknowledged sin. The artist fancied his beautiful garden became defiled at the very recollection of Monk's pilfering and the man's unrepentant attitude when called upon to confess. Those oft-repeated protestations of innocence left an uncomfortable impression on the minds of both Arrow and Josephine. Together they resolved to forget the episode as quickly as possible and never allude to it in any way. One of the artist's strongest characteristics lay in his power of controlling his thoughts and living above mundane affairs in a world created by personal genius. His success, attained through this attitude, was proved by the unmistakable charm felt by relatives, friends, servants and strangers.

Only to Mary he was the man she made him and not the man he willed himself to be. If she wished him to speak of Monk, he must needs hark back obediently to an unpleasant chapter and relieve its odious scenes. Knowing this, the soft woman's voice murmured contritely:

"I am sorry I hurt you by mentioning the subject. I must really go now. I have so much to do."

She rose and Arrow realized her departure was inevitable. The large eyes, so full of expression, held in their depths a world of resolve which no persuasions could shake. He moved to the door, opening it for Mary to pass out. Wildly he yearned for her to stay, but his tongue felt tied. He had contemplated—a thousand times—some sudden outburst of feeling in which he would entreat her to cement a profound and lasting friendship. But instinctively her spirit held him back.

To voice any such request would prove a physical impossibility, while Mary wished it otherwise, controlling his will from her pedestal of mysterious dignity. All unconscious, Oliver had betrayed to his father that he too realized she was different to other women.

"She will not unbend to me," he told Arrow, "as she does to the poor village people or the child and his mother who worship her up at the cottage. Perhaps it is because of her position here. She never forgets she is employed at Rutherwyke. It almost looks as if she preferred the position of servant to friend, yet she could be such a friend!"

Mary moved noiselessly to the door. She looked at the artist with tender concern, noting the dark lines under his eyes.

"You must rest," she said in that voice which made him associate her so peculiarly with motherhood, "rest, and do not trouble your brain with any thoughts at all. Can you make that active machine a blank just for once? It would do you so much good. Try and sleep for one quiet hour."

Arrow smiled at the advice so difficult to follow, and it struck him as strange that Mary should advocate what she most certainly failed to practice in her busy life of labor.

"For your sake, I will try," he said, "but I fear it will be an hour's meditation, in which I shall think only of the picture."

He wondered if she would interpret the words to their real meaning: "I shall think only of you."

He waited for her to answer, a fierce hope knocking at his heart that one day they would all unexpectedly face each other on a mental plane, merely as man and woman. Possibly the atmosphere of sanctity surrounding Mary

might yet be pierced by a more human comprehension, a friendship of clear understanding replacing this baffling intercourse, in which she remained upon some height he felt he never could reach. But no reply came from her parted lips, though he fancied they uttered a silent blessing, seeing they moved without speech as she turned quickly away.

"Mary," he whispered to the still air as he watched her out of sight—"Mary, woman of mystery, what enchantment are you weaving over my soul? I swear I do not love you as men love, I swear it by God, I swear it by Josephine. I have never sinned in thought or word since first I stood gazing with breathless ecstasy upon the beauty of my Madonna. How is it she brings light when she crosses the threshold and takes, when she goes, all the joy and wonder of the sun? Why does she move me in her passionless purity—to give up my will to hers, to paint as she dictates, to obey like a child her smallest wish? Is the picture mine or hers? Sometimes I think it is not mine."

He moved back to the platform and stood with bowed head before his work, fancying Mary's figure echoed his words from the canvas: "It is not mine."

* * * * * * * *

Oliver felt peculiarly troubled at receiving no answer from Rye Ireland. Sometimes he wondered if his letter had been received, often he feared his friend resented strongly the change of plans. At Josephine's earnest entreaty, he refrained from writing again, though he watched each post with daily anxiety and no little distress.

As he entered the house with his mother after their pilgrimage to London slums, the welcome sight greeted him of an envelope in a familiar hand. He tore it open

with an exclamation of delight. Then his face fell. The words were few:

"Of course, Oliver, I understand. Your glowing description of the woman was quite unnecessary; the fact that a woman stopped you was enough for me. The old saying is a wise one, 'Cherchez la femme.'"

Oliver crushed the letter in a trembling hand and hid it away from Josephine. She did not ask to read it, but from that moment they never spoke of Rye Ireland again.

CHAPTER XXI

WITHOUT SPOT OF SIN

JOSEPHINE rejoiced secretly as she realized Arrow's great picture would soon be finished. She had grown so fond of Mary since the evening of Oliver's return, she longed to see her constantly about the grounds. She never for a moment shared her husband's fear that Mary would leave, Mary who seemed part of the place already. Very gradually her charitable actions came to Josephine's ears from various sources, the deeds of kindness to sick and poor which flowed from a loving heart as water from a spring. It rather shamed Josephine to know that this woman, who worked for her living, could find scope and opportunity for outside labor which would have taxed the time and energy of leisured Mrs. Penreath.

Often Josephine viewed with a sense of scorn her easy-going life, though she saw no way of remedying the evil until Oliver returned and suggested various fields of enterprise, ideas which his mother accepted with generous response. The boy appeared daily more delighted at the sympathy won from her. It became an absorbing occupation to refer their plans to Mary and seek her advice.

Once again Oliver made his mother his constant companion and confidante, finding she could sympathize with the reverent admiration burning in his heart for Mary.

He also grew more deeply attached to Arrow, following his work with lavish appreciation.

"You know," he told Josephine, "I am gradually realizing that father is the greatest genius of his age. I never appreciated the fact before. It is wonderful—is it not?—to watch how every day he puts something fresh into the picture and always improves on what previously appeared quite perfect."

Mrs. Penreath nodded assent, but her eyes wore a pensive expression, and she seemed far away in distant realms of thought. Oliver's words were true enough, the artist had excelled beyond his wildest dreams. His wife and son could not fail to observe the development of the sacred subject, the rounding of any crude shadow, glorifying every ray of light and heightening the picture's emotional force.

At last Josephine spoke, looking into the boyish eyes curiously.

"People say, Oliver, no one is quite contented in this world, that life can never fully satisfy ambition. I have not asked your father, but I often wonder if this last great work really touches those heights of endeavor that crown his artistic desires. Does he dream, do you think, of surpassing this picture to which Mary has given so much of her time? He could not expect to find such a model again. I fear in the future he will search distractedly for a face and form capable of superseding his wonderful Madonna. All will appear common and unworthy, should he venture to draw the mildest comparison between faces of earth and our spiritual Mary of the Lilies."

Josephine borrowed this name from Oliver, whose memory of his first meeting with a sun-wreathed figure in an avenue of bloom often served for meditation and

quiet talks at twilight. He never tired of telling Josephine how deeply the stranger impressed him on that summer afternoon in a garden of sweet odors.

Now his mother's words brought a puzzled expression to his brow. The lilies were over, but fresh flowers opened as they wandered past scented borders, conversing happily in the old familiar strain.

Oliver took his mother's words to heart, a proof that his affection for Arrow had increased considerably since their first talk of Mary. Her name broke down a strong wall of reserve and heightened confidence between father and son.

"I have often wished that I had inherited his talent; I have envied him his fame," the boy confessed, "but perhaps, after all, he is rather to be pitied. Though Mary has given him her personality to breathe life into a pictured form, others will make him suffer, and he is not the man to accept suffering in a patient spirit. Possibly he will be spoiled for any future effort. If I had achieved that picture of Mary, I would never paint again. To turn out inferior work would be an insult to the masterpiece of his life."

The young man spoke with keen enthusiasm, wondering why his words brought such a sudden glow to his mother's face. He saw her eyes brighten with rapturous expectation. She pressed her hands upon her heart, as if to still its beating, as the color grew warmer in her cheeks.

"Would you—would you be glad—if he never worked again?" asked Oliver, turning to her quickly and speaking in a tone of marked surprise.

For a second she dared not answer, afraid to reveal her inward emotion. Suddenly a wild longing possessed her to betray some of the passionate yearning

which she stifled in her breast, and throwing aside reserve, she drew Oliver into her confidence.

"Oh! my dear," she said, "it is a cruel thought, yet pitifully human after all. Yes, indeed, I often wish Arrow could be just a man who relied on my love alone and for whom I made the world. I see many such fortunate women, growing old beside men whose lives are simple and uneventful, lived solely in the light of a wife's devotion. They return at night from prosaic toil, to find their recreation in a home of commonplace pleasures and useful occupations, too bourgeois, too ordinary for the hands of genius. Outside the home these humble breadwinners are just units in a crowd. They never hear the music of applause nor do their thoughts rise above the quiet joys of a domestic hearth. But in themselves they hold a glorious kingdom. The twin-heart of the wife beats in unison with the man who gives her his all in return for her all. The world does not ask to share him with her, the public take no interest in his name, she knows full well if she were to desert him, all would be emptiness and desolation. This, Oliver, is the real love, when battles are fought side by side, when two brave souls go smiling and unafraid through youth, through middle age, to the parting of the ways. Submerged, unfamous, entirely unknown, they taste the cup of rapture which I can never drink."

Josephine made her pathetic confession in a low, hesitating voice which sent a corresponding thrill of sadness through Oliver's soul. He was beginning to understand life and character as he had never understood it before. His mother, whom he always considered such a bright, joyful specimen of womanhood, was, after all, less happy than many a poorer sister. Arrow was far away in mind and spirit from the home

in which he lived, utterly independent of his wife's society, dominated by his talent. Oliver felt that a son, however loved, could never fill the gap, yet he realized his father was utterly unconscious of the wounds his fame inflicted. No advice, no entreaty could make Arrow see with Josephine's eyes, could bring before him the realization of her loneliness and heart-hunger. It was a situation to be left entirely in the hands of time.

"When father grows old and tired, when his brush is weaker and his sight less strong, when his ambitions die down with weight of years, then he may be given to you altogether," whispered Oliver, pressing her arm affectionately. "I shall watch for that day, mother, and it will be a great compensation for the failing of power and health."

They had turned into the Monk's Walk, and there stood Arrow, stretching his arms as if to dissipate some painful stiffness. He turned, hearing their steps, and smiled at his wife.

"I just came out for a breath of air and a little relaxation," he said. "Walk up and down with me, Josephine, if you are not tired. I must keep moving, for my muscles feel stiff, and my brain is clouded."

Oliver slipped away upon some slight pretext. He knew they would prefer to be alone, and he fancied Mary might have left the studio to wander in the grounds or attend to gardening business. Hoping for a glimpse of her blue dress, he hurried toward the conservatories. Fortune might favor him and throw in his path this elusive woman who so often evaded his vigilant eye. Only once he glanced back and smiled at the sight of his mother as she feasted her eyes on the form she loved in sudden sweet content.

"I want you to go away for a change," said Jose-

phine, gazing affectionately into Arrow's weary face. "All this indoor work must certainly tell upon your constitution. Surely you could leave the picture now, if only for a week, and let us get a breath of sea air. We have had so little time to ourselves, and it will be winter again directly."

She noticed Arrow's nostrils expand as if to breathe in fancy the welcome ozone. He dearly loved the sea, and the very thought of the fresh salt breezes gave him renewed vigor.

He placed one hand on Josephine's shoulder as he walked, merely to guide her steps and not with any intention of seeking support.

"It is strange you should speak of going away," he replied. "The idea has been in my mind all the morning, though not for any reason of health. You know the lesson my picture teaches—well, I think by now the central figure represents all I can ever hope to achieve. I do not pride myself on this attainment, for I lay my success at Mary Aquila's door. Whenever I look upon the Virgin of my canvas, I fancy she is the embodiment of the Bible phrase, 'Without spot of sin.' No one but this Mary, whom Constance Eastlake called miraculous, could have expressed that wondrous phrase, spoken of the blessed Mother. But still the picture is incomplete. The background should preach its silent lesson as forcibly as the holy maid. At present she is standing by a rude shrine, while above you can see the roughly carved words, 'Notre Dame des Vertus.' Yet the shrine itself is empty. I have still to place an image there which has filled the real Mary with shrinking horror and paralyzing dread. Some years ago, on my walking tour through France with an artist friend—when you were ill, remember—we came to a little fishing

village, quaintly named Ville de Marie. I have never forgotten the quiet spot, with its devotional atmosphere. It is a small locality dedicated to the Virgin, who, the peasants believe, especially blesses their labors on land and sea. I am sure I must have written to tell you about it at the time, it made such an impression on me. Everywhere the holy presence is emphasized, but in a manner so uncultured and repulsive that to a sensitive soul the inartistic handling almost amounts to insult. Close to the small inn where we stayed one shrine especially—the celebrated Shrine of Ville de Marie—lives ever in my mind. I could not possibly forget the jarring note struck by its grotesque molding, its gross workmanship. The image, made of iron, had grown rusty with many years of exposure. The figure stood upright upon a slab, cut in the cliff, the form of a shapeless and hideous woman, with hands crossed upon her breast, a halo surmounting her heavily crowned brow. The features were so revolting as to suggest a crafty fishwife swindling over a deal of herrings. They call this monstrosity the Maiden Mother, and before its malign countenance young wives, unblessed with children, come purposely to intercede. Many take long journeys to reach this spot and there prostrate themselves in all sincerity of heart, chanting a hymn, dedicated to 'Our Lady and St. Joseph.' To their wondering eyes she is the 'Bright Star of the Sea.' I have thought, Josephine, that the iron image of Ville de Marie was just the last touch my picture required. Let us go and see if the place remains unchanged. I could sketch to the life that cruel travesty of art in its rocky niche, I could make it stand out, weather-beaten and storm-scarred, on the canvas over which Mary presides with her tear-dimmed eyes, shuddering at the brazen

form, sinister and malign. It will help to express her meaning as she tells the world she is misunderstood. Its cruel countenance should recall the bloodshed and violence her name has produced, while the history of past ages shines in her face proclaiming her the victim of worship and devotion—the ever-humble, the ever-adored."

Arrow had talked quickly, walking at a sharp pace, hardly pausing to draw breath. It almost seemed to Josephine as if he forgot her presence and spoke entirely to himself. He had unburdened his mind eagerly, laying the full plan before her in reply to the suggestion they should go away. As she listened, the prospect appeared full of pleasant possibilities. A short sojourn at Ville de Marie would have the added charm of an object.

She assented to the wish with a bright smile.

"Certainly, Arrow, let us go," she said. "I am afraid Oliver will not be able to come, as he has promised to spend a great part of the vacation at the settlement we visited in London. To me such personal sacrifice is wonderful in a young man who could have every luxury and pleasure. He has a very tender heart, and he saw one of the workers in the East End looking terribly pale and tired. On questioning him, he found that the poor fellow had not been given a holiday for two years. Consequently Oliver volunteered to take his place and to send him for a rest to the seaside. I must confess my heart sank to think of my boy in those stifling slums, at this time of year, too, but at least I consoled myself with the thought I should be able to visit him and sometimes he would run down to Rutherwyke, if only for a few hours."

Arrow lighted a pipe, blowing a cloud of smoke into

an army of winged tormentors of the insect tribe. Lately he had smoked less and eaten little. Josephine noticed that in two minutes he shook out the tobacco and replaced his old favorite in his pocket.

"Rather waste of time to pity Oliver," he said, "since the work is his own choice, and he willingly accepts the obligation. But I am glad he thought of sending that poor fellow away. I have great sympathy for people who cannot afford a holiday. I was thinking, Josephine, that all this summer my work has made tremendous demands on Mary's strength. I wonder if you would object to taking her with us? Possibly she has never been out of England; certainly the little trip would do her good. Only yesterday I noticed how fragile she looked. Those very thin hands hardly seem human. The veins show through them like tendrils in a leaf. There is no place I would rather she visited than Ville de Marie, for since this picture, I cannot dissociate her from the holy figure of the canvas. Of course I have not mentioned the proposition to her, so it rests entirely with you. It was just an idea, and if you would rather we went alone, you have only to say the word."

Josephine considered a moment. She pictured her days spent in that small fishing village, while Arrow was engrossed with his important sketches for the masterpiece at home. What joy to have Mary all to herself, to sit at her feet, figuratively, rejoicing in the calm influence of her sweet, pure nature! Together they could talk of Oliver and his future, of Constance Eastlake and the child so miraculously brought to grasp the bright realms of reason. In such glad intercourse Mary would become still more a friend, one whom Josephine might bind to her for life. She looked up joyfully into Arrow's face, her eyes alight with eager expectation.

"Oh! yes," she said, "yes. Let us take her by all means. I am so glad you thought of it, dear. Will you ask her or shall I?" Arrow smiled.

"The invitation must certainly come from you, Josephine, and if we were going to some fashionable resort, I am quite sure it would be declined. Perhaps, however, Ville de Marie may appeal to her, since its very name takes a hold upon the imagination. Tell her how very quiet and simple the life will be. Tell her, too, that as she has had so large a share in the picture, I would not like to add the iron image without her approval."

Such words from Arrow were so amazing, judging from his attitude over previous works, that for a moment they took Josephine's breath away. How had this simple woman succeeded in so humbling his spirit that he asked her opinion on a subject entirely connected with his art?

"If she were to object," suggested Mrs. Penreath, "would you be guided by her?"

Arrow was not prepared to answer such a direct question.

"I would listen to her reasons," he said, "whether I should agree is another matter altogether. But you need have little fear. It was her suggestion that the pictured shrine should contain an image which is really worshiped at the present time."

Josephine was all impatience now to learn her fate. If occasionally she still felt the old thrill of superstitious dread, it was so overshadowed by love that merely to be in Mary's presence was a fund of restful happiness and unspoiled delight. The words Arrow had used kept returning to her mind: "Without spot of sin." So Mary Aquila expressed to the artist this exquisite per-

fection, this height of the immortal soul, this supreme good.

"I wonder if I should find Mary at the cottage," said Josephine. "No time like the present, you know."

Arrow noticed with pleasure his wife's enthusiastic acceptance of the suggestion he had somewhat feared to make. Her attitude warmed his heart toward her. Just as Oliver's admiration for Mary drew father and son together, so Josephine's ready acquiescence now made her dearer to her husband. He bent down and kissed her as he had not done for years, the kiss of youth and passion, long, lingering, intense. The touch of his lips on her own sent through the stagnant veins of dormant womanhood the electricity of early romance. Once again she was a girl, trembling with the wonder of awakening.

"Oh! Arrow," she whispered, "how old we are growing, only sometimes to reach back and feel like this."

The truth of the words oppressed him; he drew away instinctively.

"Yes," he said, "age is our great enemy. No good fighting against his invasion, for he gains on us all the way."

Josephine shook her head.

"We can conquer time in our hearts," she declared. "Youth is not so elusive, after all."

Arrow sighed, glancing furtively toward the studio.

"Perhaps," he murmured, "but hearts are only human, Josephine."

She could see he wanted to return to his work. His retort sounded a little cruel, still she was grateful for that involuntary moment of closer union—that long, endearing embrace.

"I will try and find Mary," she said, forcing a cheerful tone.

Once more Arrow looked bright and almost boyish.

"Why, I do believe you would like to go and pack your boxes at once, little woman," he laughed.

But Josephine did not catch the merry answer, for already she had left his side and was walking with swift steps toward the cottage.

She found Mary bending over a book of accounts, with the child on her knee. Strangely enough, it was the old book which had convicted Monk. Mary apparently was studying the entries of long ago, while Sam sat silently watching her with his big round eyes. As Josephine opened the door noiselessly the little fellow put a small pink finger to his lips and whispered: "Hush!"

Mary looked up, closed the book hurriedly and rose to her feet.

"I told Sam not to talk, as I was busy," she explained, smiling, and drew a chair forward for Mrs. Penreath.

Josephine sat down, leaning one elbow on the shabbily bound volume. Its faded and marred appearance suggested the life which had gone under, the life crushed beneath a weight of shame.

Very briefly Josephine gave an outline of her conversation with Arrow, especially emphasizing her great wish that the invitation should be accepted. "Rutherwyke could afford to spare its head gardener for this short sojourn at Ville de Marie," she warmly assured Mary.

The speaker's eyes were full of anxiety; she knew the answer meant much to her husband and perhaps more to herself.

Just for a moment Miss Aquila made no reply, but stood by the open door, looking heavenward, her whole

attitude suggesting tension and deep thought. It seemed to Josephine the blue-clad figure sought assistance from some invisible guide. Surely her soul waited for a message which other ears could never hear. The idea grew to conviction as Mrs. Penreath studied that silent form. She felt that Mary was far away, in a realm beyond the earth on which they moved and had their being.

Suddenly she turned, and her face was alight with the strange radiance so often seen upon her features.

"Yes," she said softly, "thank you, I will come. It is very good of you to take me."

Josephine sprang to her feet and waved away the words of gratitude which rose to Mary's lips.

"Please do not thank me," she pleaded, unable to conceal her delight. "I am only so very glad we shall be together. I must hurry back and tell my husband; he will be glad too."

Sam, who had stood silently near Mrs. Penreath, listening to every word, vaguely realized that the visitor intended taking Mary away. Now he crept to the loved skirts, and, seizing them in a childish frenzy, buried his face in their folds, crying with such bitterness that his sobs pierced the cottage walls, shaking his small body from head to foot. In vain Mary knelt down and clasped him to her heart, kissing away streaming tears, while Josephine assured him it would be only for a short time. Still unconvinced, he clung to the tender form, which, to his baby soul, comprised all that was sweet, beautiful and dear, holding her fast, as if the suggested holiday meant the end of life and everything for him.

"He doesn't seem to understand," said Josephine, growing impatient. "Tell him, Mary, you are coming back."

But Mary would not say the words. She only replied that perhaps she could quiet him if they were left alone. Mrs. Penreath, glad to escape from the pitiful moaning, nodded assent and stole silently away. Glancing back, she saw Sam's golden head buried on Mary's shoulder and caught the sound of unbroken wailing, loud, persistent, intense.

"What a tiresome child!" said Mrs. Penreath; then, smiling, she retold herself the glad news: "Mary consents, Mary is coming with us—Mary, our friend."

Once again Arrow's words rushed back to Josephine's mind like the music of cool, rippling streams, like floods of glorious sunlight: "Without spot of sin." How sweetly they rang on the scented air, gorgeous in their spiritual meaning, drowning the cries of a fractious child, filling Josephine's soul with the recollection of pure white lilies which bloomed no more.

She quickened her steps to reach the studio, where she knew she would find Arrow. As she entered he looked up with an expression of inquiry. She fancied he hardly liked to ask if she had seen Mary. His sensitive nature dreaded a refusal. He was so unaccustomed to be thwarted that the mere idea of having to relinquish a strong desire developed into physical suffering.

"It is all right," she said, and her voice sounded so peacefully happy and brimful of content he really felt her heart had recaptured the transient spirit of youth. "Mary will come with us. She thanks you very much for the kind suggestion."

Arrow drew in a long breath and laid down some brushes he was handling nervously. For a moment he had turned very pale, but now the color rushed back to his face in a flood of vivid crimson. He appeared quite overcome by the news, hardly able to stifle some wild,

inexpressible delight. Then his chest broadened, his nostrils grew wider, and stretching his arms he suddenly gave vent to his feelings in a low, joyous peal of laughter. Josephine welcomed the sound as an echo of youthful years.

"Good!" he said. "Welcome—Ville de Marie, welcome this sweet unbending of the one whose influence you yourself, Josephine, called so spiritual that it brought you in touch with the unseen. I begin to think Constance Eastlake was right, and Mary, the woman of mystery, holds some healing power for soul and body. Let us try and discover together what it is, what it means, what it teaches. We will be partners in this, as we are partners in life. That third presence only draws us closer together, am I not right?"

Josephine held out her hands, placing them in his outstretched palms. His touch burned like fire, but she was cool and passive, a smile on her lips, a delicate pink in her girlish cheeks.

"Yes, Arrow. It will be a journey in search of rich treasure which may be revealed to us at any moment. I have such a presentiment that something is going to happen, something unusual in connection with this visit to France; I cannot explain the feeling. Perhaps it is only the result of excitement and because Mary's presence always makes me fanciful. Indeed, we will endeavor to solve the secret of her power, to discover why she moves us so strangely. Perhaps she will tell us more of herself while we are away together. It will help her to forget her position at Rutherwyke when she is our guest and intimate companion. How soon shall we go, Arrow?"

He gazed down into his wife's eager face and gently stroked the soft flushed skin by her small ear.

"In a few days, if you are willing."

They looked into each other's eyes, each reading the mutual excitement bred by a mutual thought.

"Partners, remember," whispered Josephine.

She pressed his hands and held them to her heart as she spoke the binding words.

"My own wish," he answered. "I am not likely to forget."

As they stood side by side the eyes of the pictured Madonna looked down on them with maternal solicitude. In the background the untenanted shrine awaited the iron image of Ville de Marie.

CHAPTER XXII

THE GREATER MEANING

"So the master and mistress are taking her away with them?" said Hettie Vines.

The faintly marked eyebrows were raised as she spoke and every feature of the colorless face denoted interrogation.

"Yes," replied Matthew. "They seem wonderful fond of Miss Aquila."

Mrs. Vines was nursing Joey and trying to control the antics of his twin brother with her foot as he crawled on all fours in front of the kitchen fire.

"I'm sure," she said, leaning forward and dragging him back against her knees, "it's not to be wondered at. Though only a gardener, she's fit to take her place with the best in the land."

Hettie had joined the ranks of Mary's admirers in warm-hearted gratitude for many a kind deed. The twins, too, were ever eager for the sound of a soft footstep on the threshold, and would run to Miss Aquila's arms, drawn there by the strong magnet of affection and trust.

"I don't know how it is, but they are not shy with you," Hettie would say. "When other visitors come, I have quite a bother with the two of them hiding behind my skirts and refusing to speak civil."

Matthew was washing some earth from his hands in

a sink by the door. He had grown so thin that clothes hung loosely on his figure which, a few months ago, were close and tight-fitting.

"Of course, it is only for a short time," he declared. "Miss Aquila won't be gone long. It surprises me with the master always wanting her in the studio, how much work she manages to get through. Her eyes seem everywhere. Nothing goes on in the grounds without her knowing."

He thought, with lingering wonder, of the gentle presence which so often appeared at unexpected moments. Once or twice, when Vines became a prey to increased nervousness, Mary, with those luminous eyes searching his very soul, would suddenly stand at his side, a smile of encouragement on her lips, as she gave some word of advice about the garden. Only Vines knew how many difficulties had been overcome, how many improvements suggested and carried through. He remembered the failure of the lily crop in past years, marveling that for once Rutherwyke had boasted the finest blooms for miles around. Mere chance, of course, he told himself, yet deep down in his heart he liked to think their progress was in some way connected with the beautiful woman whom the master chose for his picture of the Madonna.

Matthew dried his hands on a rough towel and looked with pride at the two strong boys now clambering over Hettie. The sight of the children reminded him that young Sam had been giving trouble at the White Cottage.

"It's awful the way that lad of Mrs. Benn's takes on, since he heard Miss Aquila was going for a holiday. I used to say he wasn't at all spoiled, although she made so much of him, but it seems he's got a will of his own. He

has taken it into his head that she won't come back. Nothing can convince him to the contrary."

Hettie sat suddenly upright, and the straightening of her figure sent the twins sliding to the floor, where they sought entertainment in rolling over each other and trying to unlace their mother's boots.

"What has put such an idea into Sam's mind?" she asked, turning strangely pale.

Matthew failed to observe the change in his wife's face.

"I can't imagine. Perhaps he has never been with people who could afford holidays. Maybe he does not like the idea of going back to his old home. He is to sleep with Mrs. Benn, but they have permission to use the Rutherwyke garden while the family are away."

Hettie bit her lips, her fixed gaze riveted on the fire. Matthew thought she was watching for the kettle to boil. Presently she spoke.

"Mrs. Benn's house is as spick and span now as the White Cottage. You know she is quite a reformed character. Miss Aquila had the place done up for her, papered and painted decently, and Mrs. Benn takes a real pride in keeping it clean. She is a good mother to that boy at last, but I guess he will fret for the one as understands him. Miss Aquila knows how to win children. It's odd, Matthew, but I too have a sort of feeling she might not come back. I didn't like even to name the thought, for, of course, it's all foolishness. Only when you came to talk of Sam, I just wondered why the child dreaded her going much as I did when first I heard of the trip abroad."

Matthew laughed, patting his wife on the shoulder with a heavy, good-natured hand.

"You and Sam," he said, "both sort of cling to Miss

Aquila, and that is why you are a bit afraid of letting her out of your sight. If the kiddies were ill, for instance, I do believe she would be the first you'd turn to before thinking of the doctor or the parson. I've seen it with others. How they fly to her when sickness comes! You mind that evening the mistress sent me with some grapes to a poor man at Trune Well Villas? When I arrived, his wife called me in. I did not like to refuse, though I was a bit hurried. Maybe it's wiser not to dwell on sad sights, but I can't help remembering that scene. Miss Aquila had got there before me, his head lay on her shoulder, and already the death-rattle sounded in his throat. I think he blessed her with his dying breath, and if once you saw her in a sick-room you wouldn't forget the sight in a hurry. She seemed the one ray of comfort, the one pillar of strength in all that dark night."

Vines brushed his forehead with his sleeve. He drew a deep breath, and despite the heat, shivered perceptibly. His body broke out in a cold perspiration; he wiped the beads from his neck, feeling his teeth chatter. Hettie watched him with lynx eyes. She longed to question him further, but refrained with an effort.

"I was stupid to talk as I did," she declared. "It won't do for us both to get fanciful. All the neighbors are noticing how you've fallen away, and Mrs. Cray begged me to feed you up and give you some strengthening medicine, or, she warned me, there would be another empty house in Abbotts Brooke."

Vines laughed at the lugubrious words.

"Cheerful sayings to repeat!" he said, pinching Hettie's chin playfully. "They try to liven you up, these ghoul-like old women. But don't let my health worry you, Hettie. It is good to be thin, I can get about

quicker with less weight on my bones. As to dying, well, girl, there are folks that ain't fit to die, and isn't it the good ones the Lord takes early?"

A forced smile accompanied the words, which had evidently not convinced his wife.

"There's some saying of the sort," she confessed, bending over the children and concealing a sudden quivering of her lips, "but you're good enough, always thinking of me and the little ones or trying to do a kind turn to others."

Vines looked surprised. It was long since Hettie had paid him a compliment. He hardly thought she noticed his little efforts, imperfect reflections of a life-example lived with such simplicity on the Penreaths' estate.

"Oh! that's nothing," he muttered. "There is precious little I can do compared to some."

Hettie knew who was in his mind as he snatched his cap off a peg and moved to the door.

"Going out?" she queried.

He was brushing his coat with his hands and straightening his tie.

"Yes. I promised Miss Aquila to look in and see if I could strap her box or do anything for her before she started. I want to ask her, too, about the new plants which arrive to-night; she will have to leave some directions."

Mrs. Vines quite approved of her husband's words.

"Certainly go, Matthew, and help her all you can. Busy as she is, she found time to wish me good-bye this morning, and glad enough I was to see her. She took both the children in her arms and kissed them in such a way, it made one wish she were a mother. They laughed, and crowed, and stroked her face, good as gold until she left. Then they wanted to run after her, and I had

a rare job coaxing them back into the house. Joey got the better of me, for while I was shaking his brother, he popped out at the back door and started running after Miss Aquila with the old word on his lips he never forgets, 'Angel.' He always calls her that. Then she turned and whispered something in his ear, and he came toddling up to me, real sorry for being such a bad boy. I wish I knew what she said. I should like to be able to manage them in the same way, but it's just knack and patience. You see, I was born quick-tempered."

Hettie seldom acknowledged a fault, and again Vines was amazed at his wife's unexpected humility. He walked away, thinking deeply. Was this also the result of Miss Aquila's influence? As he asked himself the question, it seemed only the other day that Mary passed with such quiet dignity through Abbotts Brooke, pausing to rescue a fair-haired boy whose infant years were soiled by the degradation of vicious surroundings. How quickly the months had flown since the change at Rutherwyke and how altered the man who aspired to Monk's post! Only the knowledge that his old comrade was doing well in a new situation saved Matthew from absolute despair. Again and again he assured himself Monk was once more a trusted servant, re-established in a position of authority, well paid, well housed—outwardly prosperous and happy in his work. But even as he tried to draw comfort from the thought Vines' heart warned him happiness could not be found until the tarnished character had been cleared. Monk would never know a good night's rest, never enjoy the sweets of toil and well-earned recreation till the real thief stood exposed. When Matthew reached the White Cottage Mary was ready to go. Her box had been taken with the other luggage to Abbotts Brooke station, and after bidding

Sam and Mrs. Benn good-bye, she was to join the Penreaths, that the start from Rutherwyke might be made together.

Mrs. Benn, wearing an expression of concern, held Sam's hand tightly, while he fixed his eyes, swollen with crying, on Mary's face.

"He has promised me he will be very good, miss, while you are away," she said. "I'm sure I don't know how to thank you——"

But Mary cut short the words, since she could read in the earnest face all the gratitude of a thankful heart.

No thanks were needed, she assured Mrs. Benn, then added in an undertone: "I know I can trust the king's mother."

Vines waited outside, hearing the gentle voice speaking its farewell utterances. He felt Hettie was right in wishing that Mary were a mother. What a wealth of maternal tenderness lingered in the musical voice, inspiring love and confidence.

Suddenly the door opened and Miss Aquila slipped out, closing it noiselessly, pausing a moment to listen.

"We don't want Sam to watch me go," she explained, signing to Vines to follow her as she hurried away. "Mrs. Benn has a new toy ready to distract his attention. He will be happy again directly; children so soon forget."

As they passed by the bright hedge of holly, she glanced back at the cottage with a lingering look and sighed slightly. Then, as if shaking off a sad thought, spoke cheerfully of work to be done, giving Vines a full paper of directions for the garden, so no mistakes could arise. He appreciated her eagerness that all should go well during her absence. Nothing had been forgotten,

and he fancied her whole soul was centered in the cultivation of Rutherwyke's splendid grounds.

He spoke his thoughts aloud as he studied the writing, making a mental note to every word.

"It's a great encouragement, miss, to see how you have taken to the place," he ventured to say. "It puts heart into those who work for you."

She half closed her eyes and breathed in the fragrance of September flowers. A large verbena plant stood against her hand; she paused to press between finger and thumb those long pungent leaves with their lavish gift of perfume.

"Life without work would be very empty," she said; "and our work, Vines, is so full of teaching, if we would only accept the lesson."

"Our work!"

As these two words fell on his ear he felt his heart beat faster and the blood mount to his head. A wild, reckless desire seized him to fall on his knees at the feet of this woman and ask her to bless him before she went. His thoughts were as tangled skeins of fevered brain fabric, which whirled, twisted and beat upon his temples, while a sudden haze rose before his eyes. If she had not stopped by the verbena bush he must have stumbled and groped like a blind man. His eyeballs felt on fire; they grew painfully bloodshot. His throat was parched and his speech died upon his lips.

All the weight of his past dread, all his nervous fears culminated in an awful sense of strangulation. He dragged at his collar, breaking the stud, which fell to the gravel.

Mary, apparently unaware of his emotion, picked a tiny verbena leaf and hid it in her dress, as if all her attention were centered on the plant.

Vines gradually regained his self-control, grateful that those searching eyes were cast down. Again he whispered beneath his breath, not only to himself, but to the garden with its treasures of tree, verdure and early autumn flowers: "Our work."

That one little syllable, "our," made his daily round of manual labor sweet with the union of mutual endeavor. He saw new beauty in the delicate tints of the Surrey landscape. Mystery lurked in the tender grays of the atmosphere. He drank deeply the intoxicating freshness wafted to him through Nature's healthy mood. Life-giving breezes touched his brow, and he fancied he breathed a strange rejuvenating element in the air of the garden, which Mary enchanted by the magnetism of her presence.

"You have taught us the lesson sure enough," he declared, with complete confidence in his fellow-workers, whose eagerness to please her almost equaled his own. "No one here will be idle in your absence, miss. We shall keep things up to the mark and look for your return." Here he caught his breath, recalling Hettie's presentiment, then repeated fervently: "Ah! and look for your return."

Mary's eyes were still turned away, and now she walked quickly. No time to tarry where long beds of lavender attracted countless swarms of bumblebees. No time to snatch a sprig of rosemary in remembrance of Rutherwyke. The hour of departure was at hand, and she knew the artist and his wife would be waiting for her at the hall door. As she approached the house Vines took off his cap, murmuring a half-inaudible "good-bye."

Mary held out her hand with the frank gesture of a friend. Vines seized it, almost as a drowning man might grasp a rock of safety. Their eyes met, the

woman's tender with compassion, seeing the white misery of his face, the man's yearning to speak some secret word her presence all but forced from his trembling lips.

"When she comes back," he thought, "when she comes back, I will try and brave the worst."

The contact lasted only for a second, then the cool white hand withdrew and their brief good-bye was said. Vines remained standing by the borders of rich blossom, watching the blue figure move away with that soft tread, noiseless as a moonbeam passing through the grounds. He saw the Penreaths come out to welcome her, saw Josephine take both Mary's hands and hold them a moment fervently. Arrow looked bright and alert, all the weariness of indoor work had vanished from his face, as he greeted Miss Aquila with a smile.

Vines crept nearer, that he might keep her in sight up to the last moment. The sun shone on her blue cloak as she stepped into the brougham, the rich tone seeming to strike a note of wondrous brilliancy in the color scheme of a mellow day. Such a blue as the old stained-glass windows could show in the little church at Abbotts Brooke, where many a lover of antiquity came to examine the ancient edifice dedicated to St. Mary.

As the carriage drove away Vines followed its departure with hungry eyes, running to the south gates to gaze up Pilgrim's Way, till only a cloud of pale wind-swept dust filled the empty road. Then, as he turned back, a sense of emptiness and desolation swept over him, more complete in its intolerable solitude than any experience of recent years. It was the loneliness of spirit which weighed him down, shutting out all the brightness of the sky. Despite the dancing sunlight, he looked above with an eye of doubt.

"Working up for wind," he told himself. "I shan't be surprised if we have some strong gales within the next few days. September was stormy last year. I don't trust the weather."

As Mary drove through Abbotts Brooke she glanced neither to right nor left, though many of her poorer friends stood at their doors, guessing the carriage from Rutherwyke Place would pass at this hour. They knew from her she was going abroad, for she had bidden each a temporary farewell, leaving several small mementoes to cheer their solitude and the memory of kind words spoken in that sweetly haunting voice.

It seemed to Arrow (accustomed to watching her features) that she was deeply preoccupied. Only when the train sped away from the old scenes she threw off some disturbing thought and regained the calm beauty he knew so well.

Seated by the window with clasped hands, her eyes rested dreamily upon the fair pictures Nature unfolded to her view. A silvery light hung over distant hills and waters. Miles of land lay bathed in tender radiance. A rising breeze swept marshy tracts, merrily waving tall reeds, rocking slender boughs with a rhythmical touch of wind-blown life so dear to the heart of the landscape painter. But Arrow and Josephine looked rather at the beautiful Madonna-like face of that third presence, which fascinated them by the restfulness of its pose. Mary loosened her cloak. Gradually it fell from her shoulders, hanging about her in folds of unstudied grace, revealing the only ornament they had ever seen her wear, an old-fashioned girdle of silver gilt.

Never had the exquisite form appeared so unquestionably perfect to Josephine. She exchanged a glance with her husband, fancying his eyes said the one word,

"partners." Then she turned to her dressing-bag and drew a postcard from among the papers in an outside pocket.

"When I wrote for our rooms," she said, "Madame Tellier, the proprietress, sent me this picture of Ville de Marie, taken from the little *pension* at which we stay. I found, on making inquiries, there was no better hotel. Fashion has, so far, neglected that sweet, sanctified spot with its quiet devotional atmosphere, its many superstitions. Arrow told me quite enough of the place to fire my imagination, and I like to feel we are going to a little unspoiled world, where all the old people are only overgrown children."

She handed Mary the photograph of a wild coast, with some fishing-boats on an otherwise neglected beach, and a quaintly built inn close to the seashore, nestling between two cliffs.

For a moment the large eyes with their soulful expression studied the scene carefully; then Mary looked up with one of her sudden smiles, which seemed to diffuse light as a burst of sunshine.

"No," she said, "it has not altered at all. It is just the same dear little place. One could almost fancy it had been tossed up by the sea. The houses are so uneven, they look as if they were tumbling down."

Josephine started visibly. For a moment she thought her ears deceived her.

"You—you surely don't know Ville de Marie?" she asked in questioning surprise.

Mary appeared quite unconscious of the obvious amazement written upon Mrs. Penreath's features.

"Yes. Many years ago I stayed there for a short time. It was in the winter and the coast was terribly bleak."

Arrow bent forward, deeply interested.

"Then," he said, "you have seen the iron image?"

Mary's lips moved as if to speak, but no words came. She bowed her head in assent. Then, after a moment's pause, she recovered from her temporary dumbness and softly acknowledged:

"I have seen the iron image."

Arrow's face glowed with a rush of blood-red color, which spread to his neck and ears.

"Last night," he said, "when I closed my eyes, I tried to see the rusty figure in all its hideous detail, and suddenly the thought came to me that in my picture I would imbue it with even greater meaning. The iron image shall stand for all the cruelty of diverse faiths. The iron image shall be the stumbling-block of nations, the bone of contention over which men fight, soiling their souls with hatred and confusion. It shall represent the vast sorrow of a simple, undefiled Mother who weeps over the children of the world, entreating them to turn to One who still says pityingly: 'They know not what they do.' That Ville de Marie shrine will be the crowning symbol of my sermon on canvas."

Arrow spoke with exaltation. He seemed carried away by a sudden rush of thought. His eyes saw Mary only, Mary alone. Josephine faded into shadow. The prosaic railway carriage no longer framed the beauty of the woman to whom he eagerly unfolded his ideas. Her features drifted back to the setting of the picture, rising above a mean and garish shrine. She was no model for an artist to build his fame upon, but the real personality, dazzling, immortal, yet stricken and injured, speaking, praying, crying to the children of men: "Have pity on Joseph's wife." Instinctively Arrow gave his imagination full range. He fancied he saw the di-

vinely appointed maiden, bound in wedlock to one of low estate. He entered in spirit the home at Nazareth, piercing those hidden years, unknown to history, with the eye of vision and sympathetic understanding.

Mrs. Penreath watched him curiously. She recognized the signs of intense mental excitement in her husband. She had seen before that strange glitter in his eyes and the sudden swelling of his veins. Well she knew how constant work and brain fatigue robbed him of rest, telling upon his nervous system with relentless demands. She feared for the overwrought mind, fully realizing that genius often walked hand in hand with madness.

Mary leaned back, lowering her eyes. She hardly seemed to hear the quick flow of words, or else their utterance proved so distasteful she preferred to ignore them. The color fled from her face, leaving it like mother-of-pearl, with the softness of a fresh magnolia leaf, before the brown tint of decay creeps over its pure white surface. Josephine studied Arrow closely, then touched his sleeve, as if to rouse him from a stupor, but he neither felt the pressure on his arm nor saw her inquiring look. Josephine drew quickly back, hurt and a little afraid. His attitude of absorption shut her out, broke the partnership, left her trembling in lonely wonder, at a loss to comprehend his absent-minded attitude and deep, concentrated silence.

Mary noticed the movement, then rose, and crossing to the opposite seat, took her place at Mrs. Penreath's side, feeling the artist's wife was in need of sympathy.

"Your husband is doing a great work," she whispered in tender accents, reading Josephine's thoughts—"a work paid for with the heart's blood. Be very patient at Ville de Marie. You must give him up to this final

effort, the completion of a picture dearer to him than life itself."

Mary's words were more a command than a request. As she spoke she spread her long blue wrap over Josephine's knees, apparently to shield her from the dust of the open window.

"Dearer to him even than the partner of his life?" murmured Josephine so low that only Mary caught the words.

"It is only for a little while," she answered gently. "The picture will soon be finished now, and your rival is merely an iron form wrought by unskilled hands, an image standing (as your husband likes to think) for the cruelty of diverse faiths. If his work gains, you will not grudge him those days of labor by the sea."

Josephine leaned against the speaker with a sense of security, imparted by her nearness. She drew the cloak closer, stroking the undulating folds with hands that trembled slightly.

She longed to ask Mary why she had visited Ville de Marie in the past, what drew her to that tiny village buried in seclusion. But some such feeling as Constance Eastlake described when the Christmas Day incident remained a mystery kept Josephine dumb. If Mary wished her to know, she would surely speak again of the mysterious visit to those wild shores on a desolate coast, where only the poor lived.

Arrow remained passive and silent, his eyes resting upon the seat so recently vacated by Mary. The rush of the train helped his tired mind to develop new absorbing ideas for the strengthening of a canvas already vitally alive with suggestion. He had not noticed that his words met with no response nor did he see Mary

move to Josephine's corner of the carriage, for his thoughts were far away in distant Ville de Marie.

"The greater meaning!" Those three words rang in his brain as he dwelt on his treatment of the iron image, picturing undying controversy over sweet and tender womanhood, pitiless hate, cruel sword-thrusts, taunts, jeers, and hardest of all, an endless weight of worship, a vast, unceasing storm of prayer, lacerating a woman's humble, protesting spirit.

The train rushed on. Mary still spoke in undertones to Josephine.

"I think he will sleep," said the anxious wife, glancing across at his bent head and drooping shoulders. "He looks thoroughly exhausted."

Arrow caught the words, offering no contradiction. Instead he closed his eyes, thus avoiding conversation. Better to feign sleep than try to appear wakeful with a soul that touched already the shadowland of dreams.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHICH IS THE GATE?

THE crossing to France proved a smooth one, though news of a storm sweeping over Europe brought many prophecies of rough weather. Josephine read the accounts and trembled. She dreaded the return journey.

When they reached Ville de Marie a drifting mist hid the sea, only just revealing ghostly towering rocks, with sharp peaks shooting through a shroud of mysterious vapor.

Madame Tellier, proprietress of Pension des Voyageurs, explained that recent rains had deadened the brilliant skies for which the neighborhood was famous.

"Indeed," she said, courtesying low, "monsieur and his party have brought most unusual weather for the time of year. We are blessed with more sunshine here than anywhere for miles around. It is the special gift from our Lady of the Sea."

She bent her head reverently as she spoke the final words.

They were standing in the entrance hall of the straggling building with whitewashed walls and scrupulously clean, uncarpeted floors, which were scrubbed daily by able-bodied women, born and bred in the province, daughters of hardy fisher-folk, accustomed to manual labor. The smell of soap and water proved not unpleasing in its primitive simplicity.

"I hope you have arranged to keep us a sitting-room," said Josephine, referring to a letter written on thin note paper, bearing Madame Tellier's address.

The Frenchwoman's round, red face broke into smiles.

"Indeed," she replied, "it was such a strange request. Her visitors never required to stay alone in an apartment, except for sleep at night, but she had obliged madame. A salon on the first floor was in readiness overlooking the sea. Of course, an extra charge must be made to serve the meals privately."

As Madame Tellier spoke she kept her eyes fixed upon Mary with an expression of awed amazement, possibly created by the stranger's beauty. Though addressing the words to Mrs. Penreath, her gaze turned to that other figure, quiet, dignified, Madonna-like, in the background. They spoke of rooms, of terms—of common things—but it was no common light which leaped to Madame Tellier's face and glowed there as she scanned the third visitor. Deep down in the bourgeoise soul a great wonder kindled, though she could not have explained the exact nature of her surprise. She felt her knees knocking together beneath her plaid skirt, her bosom heaved with emotion under the crossed scarf draping her ample proportions. She hardly knew what she said to Mrs. Penreath, pulling herself together with an effort as she caught Josephine's request to kindly show them to their rooms at once.

Madame Tellier apologized for her slowness, calling loudly for some keys, which a boy in an apron brought hurriedly, as if surprised at the sharp, shrill words. Evidently haste was not the custom in that quiet, homelike retreat.

"Of course, the ladies were tired after so long a jour-

ney," Madame Tellier declared. "Their baggage should be brought up at once."

In procession they mounted the shallow wooden steps, following her down a narrow passage lined with very high doors. Proudly Madame Tellier turned a large key in a ponderous lock, flinging open the portals of the private salon.

It was a fair-sized room, very plainly furnished, with long windows opening to a balcony. On the center table a pottery vase of cottage flowers proved the one attempt at decoration.

Arrow went straight to the balcony and peered into the fog. He could hear the low sighing of the sea and the break of waves on the shore, a sound so close at hand he fancied he could have thrown a stone to the white line of foam. The beach of varied hues met the *pension* walls, where, in full sight of the windows, men and women sat mending great dark nets beneath the shadow of dry-docked boats.

"Josephine," he said, "come and look. We are right on the beach. In clear weather the view must be delightful. I had forgotten the hotel was quite so near the sea."

His wife joined him, eager to try and pierce the overhanging mist, but Mary's deft fingers were busily transforming, by a few light touches, the clumsily arranged vase to a thing of beauty.

"Mademoiselle has great taste," murmured Madame Tellier, watching the quick hands and graceful figure with eyes of keen appreciation. "Some kill the blossoms with heavy treatment, others make them to live. See, I will give you fresh flowers every day from my own garden. We pick only for the *salle à manger*, but for you I break through a rule, because—because——"

She bent forward, coughing suddenly, as if choked by violent emotion.

"Ah! *mon Dieu,*" she gasped, "I have no breath; it goes from me, mademoiselle, when I behold the perfection of your face."

Mary regarded the woman with a pitying expression, reading weakness in the gaping stare and loose, uncontrolled lips.

"You have strange ideas, Madame Tellier," she answered softly. "But please believe compliments are very distressing to me. I have no beauty but that perhaps of thought and spirit, which all may possess if they choose."

The woman flushed at the slight rebuke, and murmuring "Pardon," still stared as openly as before.

Mary smiled a sweet forgiveness, at which Madame Tellier took heart of courage, adding boldly:

"All the same, I spoke the truth, mademoiselle. People so often wish not to hear what is true, even though it be good. A beautiful lady like yourself asks not a compliment, while others seek always for the words which are false, the compliment they cannot receive by looking in their mirror."

"I wish," said Josephine's voice, "the mist would clear, if only for a minute, that we might see the view. Certainly Ville de Marie is not behaving kindly to give us such a welcome."

Arrow leaned on the iron balustrade, gazing into the hazy atmosphere.

"Perhaps," he answered in a low tone, "Ville de Marie does not want us. This cold, white mist seems to me like the frown of Notre Dame des Vertus. She is concealing her dwelling-place from newcomers, she is clouding the sea over which she presides, wrapping it in a

garment, holding it safe to her bosom, hidden from curious eyes—a pearl in a shell, a vast presence shut away behind a wall of unsubstantial haze."

His poetical idea appealed to Josephine, though it filled her with vague memories of past uneasiness, when Mary's presence at Rutherwyke first brought a sense of alarm. She experienced some such emotion as on that well-remembered evening, when, by her husband's orders, the Gabriel bell ceased to ring.

"I don't like to think the iron image may be working us ill," she said, covering the fantastic sentiment with an outward effort of lightness. "I pictured such a sun-bathed, smiling spot, but perhaps we have come a little late in the year, and the best days are over."

For Arrow her final words held a deeper meaning. He bent lower upon the rail, drawing the fog-laden air into his lungs and caring little that the balcony dripped with moisture.

"The best days are over," he echoed, and his mind recalled those quiet hours in his studio, when Mary stood in her guise of sanctity as the pure Mother, chosen of God, full of grace and virtue. Josephine, thinking he alluded to the weather, merely scanned the gray heavens to try and trace some ray of light or thread of welcome blue.

Now the proprietress pressed the newcomers to inspect their other rooms, and Mrs. Penreath turned away with a sigh. Arrow had not the curiosity to follow, but waited out in the still air, trying to catch the conversation of the netmakers on the beach. Presently he heard Madame Tellier's heavy footsteps descending the uncarpeted stairs. Then, seeing neither Mary nor Josephine had returned, he concluded they were resting,

and obeyed a sudden desire to go in search of "Notre Dame des Vertus."

As he neared the *pension* porch he heard Madame Tellier talking excitedly to a group of provincials and wondered if they were visiting Ville de Marie from religious motives or simply for the enjoyment of sea air after inland toil. Possibly they were pilgrims to the shrine of the iron image.

"*Mon Dieu!* she is *belle comme une ange*," Arrow heard her exclaiming. "Our Lady even could not be fairer. Wait until you behold with your own eyes. It is the face of a saint, sweet as heaven, bright like Paradise. To see her smile is to see the sun——"

This rapturous description broke off hurriedly as the speaker perceived Mr. Penreath's approaching figure. She dropped one of her ever-ready courtesies, asking if she could offer him any information. He paused, looking up the narrow white road leading to the foot of the cliff.

"I want to visit the old shrine, the one which contains the sacred image of the Madonna," he explained, forgetting, after his long absence, the exact locality. "I fancy it stands at your end of the town, where one turns to the beach at the corner of this road."

Madame liked the word "town" from English lips. It gave the place an added importance which pleased her ear and gratified her pride. So often she heard it termed by British travelers "a dear little village," while once it had been called in her hearing "a God-forsaken hole."

"If monsieur will go to the right just here by the post-office," she replied, "it is not three minutes' walk," pointing with a broad, square finger. "The shrine is cut in the shelter of the cliffs, a holy refuge from the

storms of winter, fit to hold our Star of Ocean, our Lady of the Sea."

She spoke with simple sincerity. Undoubtedly to her eyes the iron image was a work of exquisite design, viewed in a spiritual sense, and rapturously worshiped. Arrow paused, and his manner encouraged madame to open her expansive heart, which warmed to all the holy wonders of Ville de Marie.

"I think, monsieur, that I remember you many years ago, with another English gentleman. He was Catholic, and we had the pleasure to entertain you here. He loved this place, for he knew well how comfortable it is for our fishermen to first look, when going out on the waters, into the loving eyes of a Mother gazing at them from that sacred shrine. It is sweet also to inland pilgrims who come to us from time to time. They do not scorn her offices, for they say she shields them from the storms of the world. None enter a house but by the door, so they dare not go to their King Jésu but by our Lady, which is the gate."

Arrow listened attentively, then raising his hat, replied:

"Yes, I came in past years to your *pension*, and my friend is now dead. He often spoke of our visit; he never forgot Ville de Marie."

Madame Tellier crossed herself, muttering a prayer for the departed soul. When she looked up again, Arrow had already reached the turning to the beach and was walking briskly in the direction of the shrine.

Still the sea-fog hung heavily over the coast, and instinct guided him rather than sight to the cliff where the iron image stood, sheltered from fierce gales by a manufactured cavity. He knew he had reached the spot, for he could faintly trace the well-remembered

hollow, but the face he traveled from England to see lay veiled behind overshadowing vapor.

Suddenly the artist, standing within reach of the iron image, felt cheated and unnerved. The words he had spoken lightly enough to Josephine returned with increased significance. Was it possible that Ville de Marie hid her face to refuse them greeting? He drew a step nearer, feeling with his hands in the open hollow where the figure stood. Yes, she was there, clammy with the clinging damp that turned her metal form to piercing cold. He drew his fingers from the crowned head to the foot of a sculptured gown, hung with ropes of beads falling from the shoulders. Adoring worshipers had brought many a garish necklace to their "Dame des Vertus," the hard strings of cheap jewelry were twisted and twined together in rusty union.

Arrow measured the length of the iron Madonna roughly from his knee to his thigh, making a mental calculation and thinking of his canvas. He fancied the fog grew denser as he touched the chill form, while the damp pierced his garments, reaching his very bones. He shivered and drew back, standing in stricken silence, his mind enslaved by fantasy, his soul accepting the gloom with resignation and a certain relish now.

It was good after the strain of the journey to be quite alone, able to dream undisturbed of the picture at home and its great meaning. His sense of desolation was made complete by that white, cadaverous vapor from a shrouded sea. A mere local mist, after all, one that might at any moment rise and dissipate depression, but weird, awe-inspiring, sad as a child's funeral pall.

Gradually, through the isolation of this filmy substance, the iron image took a faint outline. Arrow watched its apparent materialization from nothingness,

with the eye of one accustomed to studying atmospheric effects. She was certainly emerging to view, that unlovely yet beloved travesty of woman. First he could trace the outline of her crown, three spikes rising from a broad band on the brow; then the hands, placed palm to palm against her breast in prayerful attitude, a girdle at her waist, a veil behind her head. As the heavy, unrefined face revealed its graceless features, the lips appeared to smile cynically. The man whose genius could create rare, delicate, elevating beauty, in which the soul shone forth with voice and rapturous meaning, felt as if his wish to see the iron image especially invoked her shadowy presence.

Once more he gave his fanciful brain full play, dwelling in thought upon an influence born of purity and love, the strong human influence of the Virgin, raising her fallen sex to a splendid pinnacle, lifting womanhood from the degradation of Eve. How had such a sweet, suffering, unassuming nature ever become debased by such gross caricature? Yet he did not grudge her that throne by the sea as he heard the waves whispering homage. He remembered how he used to think the Boulogne fishing-boats, bearing on their mast-vanes our Lady of Boulogne, were especially blessed. He recalled the large fishing fleets with their oft-repeated names: *Notre Dame de Grace, Notre Dame des Miracles, L'Immaculée Conception, La Toute Belle sans Tache, L'Etoile de la Mer, L'Etoile du Matin, La Sainte Famille, St. Joseph.* He loved the appealing music of the words, he delighted in the vast fund of legend with which his mind was stored. He could travel back in imagination and see England as she was, when her crews also visited their favorite sanctuaries.

With lingering delight he dwelt upon the years of

study given to Catholic devotion, merely from curious interest and poetical impulse, the impulse which once made the tolling of the Angelus of Rutherwyke dear to his heart and pleasing to his ear. But now his inclination to dwell on all the store of history so diligently harbored rose from something more than interest, something deeper than curiosity, a firmer basis than poetical impulse. He heard in fancy the voice of Mary Aquila ringing in his ears, speaking again in pained accents of a maiden living in humble seclusion, a wife seeking no queenship, a disembodied spirit weighed down by the prayers of suffering humanity.

A soft wind came stealing from the sea, dispelling the wall of fog, bringing the shrine into clear relief, baring its trappings to the light of day. Within the sheltered alcove the cliff was painted brilliant blue, while pinned to a large blackboard prayer cards and written messages rotted on soft, moldy paper. Arrow's long sight could read many of the words distinctly, and as he followed them with his eyes his lips spoke the sentences aloud:

"Come to Mary, all you who are laden with works, and weary beneath the weight of your sins, and she will alleviate you."

"Holy Mother, intercede for us to the Lord God. Thou who abidest with the saints, full of grace and virtue, loose the bonds of sinners, set us free."

"Oh! Evening Star of purity and light, watch thy children on sea and shore with eyes of love and heart of pity; protect, reward, enrich them with the full joys of the spirit, and answer those who call upon thy name."

Arrow read no more. He closed his eyes that he might not see the ungainly form and thick, coarse lips of the iron image, brown with rust. He saw instead the pictured face in his studio at home, the sacred, pure

face of the God-chosen Maid to whom Gabriel brought a message of miraculous motherhood. No wonder that she was clean from every sin, hallowed, sanctified, remembered throughout all ages; no wonder the world had built round her name that wall of defense, that mystical edifice, clinging to a great and reverent injustice. Was she not exquisite? was she not true? did she not reign in their hearts with all the witchcraft of undying charm?

As this swift current of imagination flooded his brain he was conscious of another visitor standing behind him, facing the shrine.

He turned aside, fearing his presence might hinder some pilgrim fired with devotional enthusiasm. As he glanced across his shoulder, his eyes fell on Mary Aquila. She was not looking at the shrine in the cliff, with its dark, weather-beaten statue; she looked instead at Arrow. Her face wore the same expression as his canvas at Rutherwyke, spoke the same lesson, framed the same plea. She appeared to the man mysterious as the changing ocean of light and shadow, with its white foam and gorgeous azure, its opal, gray or evening silver. She possessed the nameless quality of the sea, ruled alone by mighty forces, directed by invisible elements.

"Come away," she said, stretching out her hand and touching him lightly on the shoulder.

The two words sounded like the double note of a bell rung from some distant church spire and heard across space—soft, veiled, beseeching. The sudden request filled him with surprise. He discerned a depth of meaning in the eager, emphatic voice.

"Why?" he asked. "Why?"

It was a sharp, persistent why, echoed with quick repetition.

She shivered and could give no answer, only the place appeared to oppress her terribly.

"See," he continued, "the mist is floating away; there will be no more rain."

He pointed to the lifting fog across the water taking strange shapes like spirit forms in winged flight.

Certainly, as she fixed those wonderful eyes upon him, she was far more fragile and puzzling than in past days. He wanted to touch her cloak to make sure it was real, but she drew back, and he could not do so without attracting notice. She looked taller, more transparent; he fancied the mist hovered about her head, hanging veil-like from the smooth, thick hair.

"You are doing no good here now," she whispered faintly. "The journey was long, your brain is weary, you are laying yourself open to every influence that is sinister and malign. Later, when the skies clear, you will make the needful sketches and then go back quickly —quickly to Rutherwyke."

He fancied he saw a glistening tear on the long lashes. He certainly felt in every fiber of his being the echo of some racking pain, whether mental or physical he could not discover. He knew undoubtedly that Mary suffered, an unaccountable ill caught her in unseen chains, torturing each nerve, straining her rich fund of endurance.

"You are not happy here," he said, rushing straight to the point. "Perhaps the place has sad memories for you, and you ought not to have come."

She smiled faintly, and once again his imagination played tricks with Mary's smile, which became part of the pale shroud enveloping the beach, drifting away like the wandering fog to those sharp rocks beyond. Emerging from the shallow water, their twisted forms

suggested the dead rising from a watery tomb. Each rock had a separate personality. Arrow pictured them as gruesome corpses of the sea, answering the call of resurrection.

"Yes, Ville de Marie holds memories, but I did right to come," murmured Mary softly.

The final words were spoken in a key so decisive they left no room for doubt. One of Mary's strangest attitudes lay in her humble self-effacement, combined with complete assurance. She never wavered in a decision nor regretted any action. She appeared guided by invisible hands, driven by impulse—the servant of some great, incomprehensible power. Arrow realized this more acutely every day. The fact came home to him with the force of absolute conviction. No longer a mere fancy, it joined the realms of actuality, carrying him into deep under-currents, full of meaning, replete with inspiration, born of Mary's will.

He wanted to talk of those Ville de Marie memories, but, like Josephine, he felt his tongue mysteriously tied. He dared not question Miss Aquila, who now appeared as a strong magnet drawing him away from the shrine.

Even before he decided to accept her advice he found himself hurrying, as if compelled, in the direction of the *pension*. Mary walked at his side, but her light footsteps made no sound, and again the strange thought returned that somehow she looked different to the woman who tended the flowers in the Rutherwyke garden. Her dignity shone forth with a new magnificence. The sensation described by Josephine of inward dread for the first time found its echo in Arrow's heart.

"You must not be surprised at anything that happens," whispered his guest's voice, and for a moment the man thought it must be some phantom warning,

wafted to him on the gentle breeze, lifting that veil of white mist from the face of the waters. "There are periods which come to all, when their quiet, tranquil days break into storm, when action marches and the mind is brought to understand the wonders of an unseen world. These are the hours of the waking soul. Through half a lifetime, perhaps, its spirit sleeps, tranquil and undisturbed, chained to earth by material fetters, then the call comes and the eyelids open."

Arrow smiled, but not of his own free will. The smile apparently arrived unbidden in answer to her words. It seemed part of the emancipation of a dormant soul, crushed by mundane existence. He wondered involuntarily if Mary's voice already called it from the slumber of long years.

"How can I promise not to be surprised?" he asked. "Don't you know from the first moment I met you I have never ceased to feel puzzled by your every word and action? You have been the marvel of my existence. I cannot but wonder, puzzle and seek—yes, seek—always to know you better, to solve why you are here, what you would do. Surely you are clever enough to know the post you hold at Rutherwyke, the situation of gardener, is unworthy of one so beautiful, talented, loved and admired. You could have stayed with Lady Constance for life. She longed to treat you as a sister, to make much of you, to take you into her world; but you refused. She figuratively showed you all the kingdoms of the earth lying at your feet, and you turned, instead, to the lowly path, you came to work in our garden——"

He broke off suddenly, the words half choked him, but Mary repeated them quickly with a force and meaning he had not expected from her lips.

"Yes," she said, "to work in your garden, and there was work to do, work as yet unfinished."

He put his hand to his forehead, feeling the throbbing of his temples. He guessed her retort held some deep significance.

"Do you remember," he whispered, "the first day I saw you with the passion flowers, the day we spoke of the Gabriel bell, the day on which I conceived the soul and body of my picture? You were sent for the purpose; I believe it was ordained by fate. You came to me that my brush might not only create a thing of beauty to please the senses, you meant to breathe life into that dead canvas, to give it voice—to plant a lesson in a silent work. For this you tarried, for this you slaved, for this you gave your time, your beauty, your incomparable self."

He paused, standing beneath the shadow of the cliff, gazing at Mary with searching eyes and livid features, with hands clenched, breast heaving, head thrown back.

She made no comment on his words, threw no light upon the mystery of her presence, instead she spoke of the picture, spoke as an oracle might, with a sphinx-like expression on the face usually so tender, with an almost maternal love for those about her.

"My work in that direction is over," she said. "I have only to think of the garden now. But in case I should no longer be with you, remember the picture is not for England alone; it is for the whole world."

He stared at her with questioning eyes.

"How do you mean?" he asked. "Tell me your wishes, give me your ideas. Sometimes I think the picture is more yours than mine. The lesson that central figure breathes to man is spoken by your eyes, which plead with a force greater than any human tongue. You have

a right in the decision of its future. I dedicate every stroke of work in it, every high ambition, to you—and you alone."

She hardly seemed to hear the words, evidently her mind was wrapt in thought. He waited for her to speak, burning with impatience, straining his ears to catch her faintest whisper.

"Simply call the canvas 'Mary,'" she proclaimed with decision. "No startling or lengthy name to attract the public ear, just the one word—Mary. Do not send it to crowded galleries; it shall not appear at the Academy. First let it be exhibited in London quite alone, free of charge for a time, that all may see, afterward for money, a portion of which share with the poor. Every one who views this Mary must be given a paper with a printed explanation of the canvas, that no man, woman or child can mistake what your pictured Madonna would say. Exhibit the work later in every European capital, with the same words of explanation, which I will write to-night. Never forget this picture is a voice to be given to the world and should be held apart from all your other works. Will you promise to carry out my wish? Will you strive your hardest not to fail me?"

Suddenly her voice softened to deep pleading. Arrow could trace in it the tears of a great agony. She was walking toward the porch where Madame Tellier sat behind her little bureau window, knitting peacefully.

Arrow felt stunned, bewildered. He lost his hold upon earth, all sense of time and place escaped him. He moved like one in a dream, enslaved by the mysticism of an unearthly influence.

"I promise," he said convulsively; "I promise."

Already they had reached the entrance of the *pension.*

"Now," said Mary, "go upstairs and rest."

Once more the mother-note sounded in her voice, sweetly low, tenderly commanding. She turned to leave him, not waiting for his reply.

He put out his hand to detain her, he touched the long cloak, but it slipped through his fingers like a cloud.

"Where are you going?" he asked eagerly.

He met the full radiance of her eyes, and winced as if he faced the sun.

"Back to the iron image," she answered, and her words held no compromise or invitation.

Arrow stood rooted to the spot, his blood freezing in his veins.

"Alone?" he queried.

"Yes, alone."

He watched the blue figure out of sight, then turned into the *pension*, not daring to follow Mary against her will. Madame Tellier rose and addressed him, but he passed her without a word, utterly ignoring her remark, unable to muster sufficient breath to speak.

Madame Tellier's eyes followed him with open curiosity.

"He looks as if he had seen a vision," she told herself. "It is often so at Ville de Marie. Notre Dame des Vertus has made converts in the past, why not again—why not again?"

Then bending low in silent prayer, she added with reverent devotion:

"Maybe he has called on our Lady's name, and she, which is the gate, has opened to his call."

CHAPTER XXIV

WHERE THE TREE FALLS

SCARCELY a week had passed since the Penreaths left Rutherwyke and the threatened storm was sweeping over England with a violence that carried destruction in its train. Sometimes Sam thought the fierce winds wailed for Mary. They had come surely to echo the sorrow in his baby heart. Then his mind changed, and the boisterous gale was a high-spirited playfellow, affording unlimited amusement. He would race the scattering twigs from fallen branches and revel in chimney-pot ruins or climb the wrecked limbs of trees when the first fury of the hurricane abated. His golden curls danced to the tune of the gale, and he asked always—always to go to the garden he loved, that he might amuse himself there alone with the little toy barrow, kept in the potting shed by Vines' permission.

Mrs. Benn declared it was terrible to see the flowers so battered and the leaves blowing down already, enough to break Miss Mary's heart, she as always wanted to have things tidy. Then Sam replied with his winning infantile smile: "He would make everything all right; he was going to put the place straight and help the men."

The gardeners were entertained by his innocent attempts at imitation, and chiefly because Mary loved him,

they never found Sam in the way or spoke an unkind word.

Mrs. Benn was glad enough for the child to stay out in the open air, enjoying the beautiful grounds, for already she busied herself making winter clothes, finding the solitude of the cottage not unwelcome. She had learned from Mary the value of a quiet mind. Her days were now ordered by well-thought-out methods, while the mere memory of the Lion's Claw was but an evil dream of long ago.

As usual, Sam, despite the roughness of the weather, resorted to Rutherwyke Place to lend his small arms in willing service, fondly imagining he worked for Mary. The garden looked strangely empty and desolate, with waving trees like animated giants, murmuring songs of wrath. The wind, rushing through the leaves, sounded strangely similar to the roar of the sea, and the inky skies were undoubtedly working up for thunder. Sam ran first to the White Cottage and gazed upon its drawn blinds and locked doors. The sight of the vacant dwelling brought hot tears to his eyes. Yesterday his mother had aired the rooms thoroughly, but to-day she decided not to open so much as a chink, since the wind blew everything about. He turned away, unable to look on the home Mary had deserted. As he ran toward the Monk's Walk the first crash of thunder pealed out overhead. Sam put up tiny hands to little pink ears with a sharp cry. Then the lightning flashed again across the garden and the rain came beating down, first in long, straight strands, then in hard hailstones that leaped upon the gravel and rolled into melting heaps of white mystery.

Sam ran to the shelter of protecting trees, selecting a large horse chestnut which offered the gloom of a vast

shade. There, at least, he could hide his face against the great gnarled trunk and weep out his terror unseen.

* * * * * * * *

Hettie Vines stood at her window.

"My word," she cried, "it's enough to bring down every tree in Rutherwyke! You mark what I say, Matthew, there will be a deal of damage done. What a mercy you just got back in time. You could do no good up at the garden in this storm, and I should have felt uneasy."

The twins were whimpering with fear, hiding under the parlor table, while Vines knelt on the floor, trying to comfort their distress.

"It's all right, Joey," he said, "just lug that fat brother of yours out by the foot, and dad will give you both a ride on his knees."

This cheerful prospect was about to be put into practice when a loud, persistent knocking at the door startled the inmates. Hettie flew to lift the latch, while Matthew sprang to his feet. On the threshold stood Mrs. Benn, pale and trembling, with rivers of water dripping from a small black cape over her shoulders. It had been impossible to hold up an umbrella in the fury of the storm, and her skirt, splashed with mud, hung in saturated folds to her shaking limbs.

"The boy," she gasped, "my Sam, he's up at the garden; he's there all alone, him as near dies of fright at a bit o' summer lightning. Maybe he will get under the trees, and the Lord knows that's dangerous enough. I thought perhaps Mr. Vines would come with me and help find him. It's mighty rough, but for the sake of the child——"

Her words broke off under a chilling gaze from Hettie's small light eyes.

"It isn't fit for a dog to be out," declared Mrs. Vines deliberately, "and yet you ask my husband to go and play nursemaid to your boy. If Sam is abroad such weather it's your own fault for not keeping an eye on the clouds. It was easy enough to see the storm coming."

Mrs. Benn began to weep into a large colored handkerchief.

"I was that took up with me needle I never thought to look out," she sobbed, "till I heard the thunder and saw the lightning flashing through my window. He's my only one, and if aught happened to him—well, there's no saying what would become of me. As to Miss Aquila, she set such store by the boy, I couldn't face her if he came to harm."

Already Matthew had seized his cap and was gently pushing Hettie to one side.

"You're never going?" she gasped, reading the answer to her question in the man's determined expression.

He repeated Mrs. Benn's plea in a tone which left no room for argument. "For the sake of the child," he whispered, and the hand on Hettie's shoulder tightened to an affectionate little squeeze. She fancied his eyes betrayed a truer interpretation of the words.

"He meant 'for the sake of Miss Aquila,' " she muttered to herself as she watched Matthew vanishing through torrents of rain with the drenched and shivering Mrs. Benn.

* * * * * * * *

The storm still raged and Vines had not returned. It seemed an interminable age to Hettie since he hurried away in search of Sam. She made no attempt to comfort the twins with words of consolation, but at each fresh howl scolded them harshly, while her body shook

from head to foot with nervous physical discomfort. The thunder jarred terribly upon her highly strung temperament. Her forehead pricked as if a thousand needles played on the sensitive skin, piercing to her brain cells. She moved up and down the room, ill at ease, quick to note a gradual fading away of the heavens' artillery and the lessening of raindrops beating monotonously upon the windows. Only the wind's wild roar rose higher and higher, rattling doors, blowing soot down the kitchen chimney and filling the house with volumes of smoke. She wanted to prepare a meal, but found cooking impossible under present conditions. She gazed in despair at the smothered embers, wondering what could be done to get over the difficulty. She knelt down to rake away the soot and lay fresh wood, with eyes smarting from the smoke, when once again that same persistent knocking sounded on her ears.

"Mrs. Benn back again," muttered Hettie, rising. "Her fist is enough to break the door in, but I suppose the poor creature must be terribly wet and cold, and doesn't care to be kept waiting."

Running to the door, she opened it eagerly, anxious to hear the result of the pilgrimage. There stood Sam and his mother, the child clinging to the rain-drenched skirts, the woman shaking violently as if her limbs were giving way, her lips unable to frame the words she struggled to utter.

"Good gracious, Mrs. Benn, what's up with you? Surely you've got 'im safe enough? Sam don't look any the worse."

Suddenly the black-gowned figure straightened to its full height, the veins appeared to swell above Mrs. Benn's dark collar band, she wrung her hands as if in agony.

"Sam," she gasped—"Sam was under the tree. Mr. Vines—he—he called to him. He ran forward, quicker than I could run, you know, and then there was a crash —a bough fell——"

Hettie sprang suddenly forward, clutching Mrs. Benn by the shoulder, her face blanching under colorless strands of fair hair, while her eyes started from her head like a hunted animal's beneath the jaws of pursuing hounds.

"It fell—it fell—on Matthew!" she shrieked, shaking Mrs. Benn's thin form with such violence that her brain reeled and her bonnet fell backward on her neck. "Oh! you cursed woman, you took him there—you took him to his death——"

"No, no, no," gasped Mrs. Benn, with chattering teeth.

Hettie paused, and letting go her hold, fell against the wall.

"Not dead. Oh! God, not dead," she wailed hysterically, while Sam's mother reassured her as best she could.

"No, dearie, but a bit hurt, you see—a bit hurt. If we hadn't been there to run for help, he might have laid for hours, poor fellow; but the men came at once and got 'im out. They are bringing 'im on a shutter, and Mr. Porterton, who heard the crash, has run for a doctor. Now, don't take on" (as Hettie began beating the wall with frenzied hands), "taking on never helped a body yet in trouble."

With a sweep of her arm Hettie pushed Mrs. Benn on one side and rushed into the road.

"Which way are they coming?" she demanded fiercely, and her face looked so wild that Sam burst into tears at the petrifying sight.

"Down the drive to the south gates," answered Mrs. Benn, vainly trying to hold her back. But the feeble, protesting hands were as straw before Hettie's muscles, suddenly strengthened by frenzied terror. She shook herself free from the clinging woman and with shrill cries and heart-breaking sobs started off bareheaded in the direction of the Rutherwyke grounds.

Hettie fancied she first saw the little procession coming toward her through a mist of blood. The undergardeners bore him and most of the house servants followed, with faces of keen anxiety, blanching whiter as they turned to the victim's wife in sympathy and commiseration.

Stretched on a shutter, Matthew lay insensible, looking like death, save for his faint breathing. With extraordinary violence Hettie pushed through the women who tried to keep her back. But for their supporting arms she would have fallen forward prostrate on her husband's injured body.

Instead they held her as she stood looking down upon him with agonized eyes, while unrestrained screams broke from her lips, ringing through Rutherwyke in frenzied despair.

The men bearing their burden walked on toward Vines' home, leaving the women to grapple with Hettie, their blood curdled by her nerve-shattering grief.

Meanwhile Mrs. Benn flew upstairs to prepare a bed, whispering to Sam to take the twins out into the back yard until she called them in. They would be glad enough to play there now the rain no longer fell.

Porterton arrived first with the doctor, and together they went to meet the men on their slow march.

Hettie, silent at last, passed through the south gates, stupefied, dazed and utterly exhausted. To shriek or

scream would have proved a physical impossibility after that first ungovernable outburst. Only she walked like an old woman, bowed down by her weight of woe.

As they bore Matthew into the house Sam, true to his instructions, kept the four-year-old children well out of sight.

"Why have you been crying?" asked Joey, ever curious for information, his sharp eyes noting the trace of recent tears.

Sam wiped his cheeks vigorously.

"I saw a man killed," he replied, believing the words were true.

"What man?" asked the baby voices in chorus.

Sam wrinkled his brow in thought.

"Well, they wouldn't let me look," he said, "but I think it was your father."

CHAPTER XXV

THE LAST LETTER

HETTIE moved away from Matthew's bed and followed the doctor downstairs. Her eyes were weary from an all-night vigil, her face appeared to have shrunk to infinitesimal proportions; she looked on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

"Is he better this morning?" she asked with the eagerness of one who (knowing the truth) feigns to believe it false, fiercely rebelling against reality.

The medical man shook his head, looking with sympathy upon his trembling questioner.

"You must prepare yourself for the worst, Mrs. Vines," he said candidly. "The crushing blow your husband received yesterday unfortunately ruptured an internal organ. I cannot hold out the smallest hope of his recovery. He might last a couple of days, he might die within a few hours."

She put up her hands to her head and groaned.

"Try," continued the doctor, "to make his end as quiet and peaceful as possible. Control your grief; it is all you can do for him now. I understand Mr. Oliver Penreath has been telegraphed for, and is coming from London by the first possible train. If he caught the early express, he should be here in a few minutes. It might be advisable to let him go to the room alone. I would rather only one person saw the patient at a time;

a mind so weakened is easily confused. I will look in again before lunch. Muster all your courage, my poor woman, and try to show your husband a bright face."

Hettie's features were rigid as stone, save for a slight twitching at the corner of her lips. She nodded, swallowed hard and opened the outer door for the doctor, who hurried to his carriage with head slightly bent.

A little flock of anxious neighbors waited for the latest report. Hettie vouchsafed no word, she just made a gesture which conveyed the hopelessness of the case and vanished back into the silent house.

They turned away with tear-dimmed eyes and aching hearts.

"The parish nurse told me it was no good expecting him to recover," said Mrs. Cray, foremost among the group. "It's a vital organ he's ruptured under that dreadful tree. Seems like being stricken down by the hand of God, it do! She'll take this hard, will poor Hettie. She was always telling with such pride of the work he did at Rutherwyke Place, and how some day, for sure, he would be made head gardener, with her living up at the White Cottage. Now that very garden has proved the death of him."

The speaker stepped aside to let Oliver Penreath pass. He was walking from the station with quick strides and only just acknowledged the "good-morning, sir," from several voices.

"Of course, he has come down special," they said, watching him curiously till he reached Vines' door. "Nice news he'll have to send to his pa and ma out on their holiday abroad!"

Mrs. Benn, who was helping Hettie with the housework, let Oliver in.

"Mrs. Vines," she said, "had seen him coming, and

was that upset, she asked if he would kindly go to Matthew alone while she washed and got a bit straight. You see, sir," explained the woman, "that poor creature sat up all night just in the clothes she was wearing yesterday, and she thought she would take this opportunity of tidying herself while you were in the sick room. The doctor, too, wanted one to go up at a time."

Oliver asked a few details, then softly mounted the stairs. He opened the door without a sound and entered on tiptoe. The blinds were partially drawn, and already it seemed like a chamber of death. He realized as he moved to the bed that even in a sick room the world intrudes, remembering a quotation recently heard: "No disinfecting sheet can shut out the microbes of restlessness."

As Matthew perceived the newcomer, he tried to smile faintly, an effort so infinitely pathetic that it brought a lump to Oliver's throat. He sat down and took Vines' hand tenderly, realizing the sufferer was in a state of collapse and that words were unnecessary, since sympathy spoke through the familiar contact of united hands.

Though the light was dim, he easily discerned the ghastly pallor of Matthew's face and saw the clammy perspiration standing in cold drops upon his forehead.

Presently Oliver whispered:

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

The simple words, so full of sincerity, roused the dying man from a stupor. With an effort he pulled himself together, and a feverish light leaped to the sunken eyes, which glittered with a strange, glassy stare.

"Hettie is not here," Matthew whispered in a strained, eager tone.

"No. Shall I fetch her?"

Feebly the sufferer shook his head, and Oliver bent down to catch the next words. They were very decisive.

"Open the desk on the right of the window, bring me an envelope and sheet of paper. See if you can find some sealing wax."

Oliver rose quickly, obeying the instructions, as Vines' eyes followed him in hungering anxiety.

"I will write anything you like to dictate," said his visitor in quiet, soothing tones.

Vines gave a little groan.

"No," he muttered, "no, if I have strength—I must write myself."

"Impossible!"

The word broke involuntarily from Oliver, regretted as soon as spoken.

Perhaps Vines did not realize his serious condition, perhaps he hoped to recover.

But the now excited man paid little heed to the retort, giving his orders in sharp, pain-fraught accents.

"Prop me up, find a pencil, give me the Bible to write on."

Oliver hesitated. His intense reverence for the holy book made its use as a desk appear sacrilegious, even at such a time. Then, seeing no other volume or writing board, he reluctantly obeyed the request.

"It's to help me," whispered Vines, "to help me in what I've got to say to Miss Mary."

Oliver's heart beat faster. He placed the pencil in the man's shaking hand and drew back that he might not see the written words.

As he waited, Oliver conjured up that pure, sweet face, wishing with all his heart she could be there by the

bedside, ministering to the soul on the dark boundary of death.

Then he looked at Vines. Sudden amazing strength seemed miraculously imparted. The shattered frame had power to achieve a task which weakness ever shuns, the writing of a long, closely worded letter. From brow to chin the livid face became bathed in perspiration. Vines was breathing now as a runner who falls exhausted at the goal, his mouth open, his eyes bloodshot, his panting audible and quick. Still he wrote with uncanny speed, as if the silent sentences raced his unknown foe. Thus he spoke to Mary from the very brink of the grave, his last supreme effort was for her. The enemy Death stood over his hand as it moved across the paper, yet for a moment the writer forgot fatigue and pain in the excitement of putting down a vital message that must be given before it was too late.

As Vines signed the document, he fell back, utterly prostrated, gasping in a voice of intense exhaustion:

"Seal and address to Miss Aquila—for the love of God—to be given after my death. Hettie not to know." Then in a louder voice, raising his hands with a fruitless attempt to emphasize the words by gesture, he cried distractedly: "Hettie not to know."

Oliver bent over him, taking the paper reverently, fastening down this secret missive before Matthew's eyes and carefully sealing it with a scrap of wax found in the dusty desk.

"I promise to fulfil your wishes," he whispered tenderly. "The letter shall go, and no one will be told. You can rely absolutely on my word."

Vines tried to thank him, but was overcome by intense drowsiness. Presently he said faintly: "Miss Mary will know what to do, she'll know." Then even more feebly

he murmured "forgive," while his lips quivered, growing strangely blue.

Oliver moved to the door, calling in a low but penetrating voice: "Mrs. Vines."

Already he had carefully hidden the letter in the pocket next his heart.

Hettie came running at the sound of her name. She flew to the bed and fell on her knees. Oliver followed and knelt down beside her.

"He is unconscious?" she whispered.

"Yes."

"He will never speak again," she moaned, "never—never—never."

Hettie buried her face in the coverlet, and her frame shook with sobs.

Matthew's breath grew fainter each moment; he seemed like a sleeping child.

"Did he say a last word?" she asked tremulously.

The question came so unexpectedly that for a moment Oliver was nonplussed.

Then he surmounted the difficulty with sudden inspiration:

"Your husband spoke your name. I heard him say 'Hettie' twice."

The statement was true, yet Oliver felt he had lent himself to deception.

An expression of vague satisfaction crossed the wife's face, marred and almost unrecognizable by the disfiguring hand of grief.

"He said Hettie twice," she repeated, stifling a sob. "Then his last thoughts were for me."

CHAPTER XXVI

A DEAD MAN'S DEED

MARY made no further allusion to the iron image or the picture at Rutherwyke. She gave the promised paper to Arrow, in which she had penned the explanation of his great work, without a word.

Not until he was alone did he dare trust himself to read the contents. He felt convinced the dreaded separation was near at hand, he knew instinctively this incomprehensible woman would soon drift out of their lives. The document appeared to the artist's excited brain like a living utterance spoken in clear, ringing tones. In his eyes the words were illuminated by golden light, much as the name "Mary" stood out, unmarred by scorching flames, from Constance Eastlake's letter, when first she suggested sending Miss Aquila to Rutherwyke. He refrained from reading the picture's explanation to Josephine, for a while he wished to keep this delicate yet forceful composition entirely to himself. It expressed the very soul of his canvas, speaking directly to the heart of the simple, as well as appealing to learned minds. It was written with biblical terseness and biblical inspiration. It laid a wealth of meaning before the reader in few but graphic phrases, drawing aside a veil, letting in the pure, dazzling light of understanding.

When he thanked Mary, she raised a protesting hand,

while her eyes entreated silence. He guessed her simple, retiring nature dreaded the warm praises he would like to have uttered, and in respect to her wishes he sealed his lips.

Since that first foggy day of arrival Mary conspicuously avoided the shrine of Ville de Marie. While Arrow sketched its every detail, she walked with Josephine, making every possible excuse to avoid passing the spot so hallowed in the eyes of the French peasantry. If Mrs. Penreath insisted, anxious to view her husband's progress, Mary would leave her, returning to the *pension* by another route.

"Do you so dislike the iron image?" asked her hostess curiously on one of these occasions.

Mary paused before replying, and Josephine, recalling the fact of a previous visit, wondered if this spot held some sad associations.

At last the answer came in lowered accents.

"I shall go there once again before I leave, and that will be enough. The place is full—so full of pain."

Her listener, quite unable to understand, tactfully lapsed into silence.

These swiftly passing days were very dear to Josephine, despite the ominous fact that already the sea worked up for storm. White breakers were visible as far as eye could reach, and news from England proved anything but reassuring.

To Josephine especially Mary gave the full benefit of her society during these leisure hours. The artist's wife had seldom appeared so happy and contented as during that quiet week at Ville de Marie. She felt as though Mary were teaching her how to live, guiding her step by step to greater strength as a loving mother shows her child the way to walk. Yet Mary was a young

and beautiful woman, while her pupil had weathered the storms of life, leaving youth, with its numerous illusions, behind.

"You really should think more of yourself," she told Mary. "The world could hold so much that is dazzling for you. I am growing old, yet I figuratively sit at your feet and learn. I am trying to rise above the little petty jars of earth, to share your wider view, to expand my sympathies and take into my heart all the great crowd of sufferers who faint by the way. But then I have had my days of pleasure, but you are still upon life's threshold. You possess the precious boon of youth, rich and ripe with joys that never return."

A wondering expression stole over Mary's face, the look of one who sees back through long years of experience. Her eyes held in their depths the history of countless ages; they were utterly inexplicable.

"I have joys of which I never speak," she said, "and they are sufficient for me."

She was standing alone by Josephine on the *pension* balcony. Morning sunlight streamed in floods of silver over mighty breakers dashing their weight of foam in restless torment upon a glistening beach.

The two women were waiting for the arrival of letters from England, then they intended taking a stroll before *déjeuner*, despite the rising wind, which made walking difficult.

"We might go inland," Josephine had suggested, "avoiding the path by the cliff. We shall be blown off our feet unless we find a sheltered road."

As Mary mentioned her unknown joys, the sitting-room door opened and Madame Tellier herself brought the English post.

The proprietress grieved daily that the beautiful

lady with Monsieur and Madame Penreath appeared so seldom in the public salon. Merely for the sake of feasting her eyes upon Miss Aquila, she would snatch the letters from the *femme de chambre* or perform the most menial service, feeling amply rewarded by a word from Mary's musical voice, a look of acknowledgment or a passing smile. She envied those who waited upon the stranger. She yearned to perform some task of sacrifice by which she might win the undying gratitude of the guest who bore our Lady's name and whose face was fair as a pictured Madonna.

Josephine took up Arrow's letters, and seeing one from Oliver, proceeded to scan its contents, first noting there was yet another in the same familiar hand. She wondered why Miss Aquila quickly concealed it and hurried away to her room. What could the boy have written to excuse such strange conduct? Just for a moment Josephine's brow clouded, then banishing with horror the faintest touch of suspicion, she turned to the closely worded sheets, written, to her surprise, on Rutherwyke notepaper, and bearing the Abbotts Brooke postmark.

Once alone, Mary locked her door and moved up and down her room with restless tread, holding the unopened letter between the palms of her hands. Her pale face looked racked and tortured with sudden pain; then she broke the seal, drawing forth the letter in Vines' weak, uneven writing.

The lines sloped and many of the letters were only partially formed; it was palpably the effort of a hand cramped with pain.

"O Merciful Miss Mary"—ran the faintly traced words—"this will reach you after my death. Before

you went away I tried to own how a black hour of temptation led me to a veritable hell on earth. My wife, dissatisfied with small means, craved for better living, little knowing her words would drive her husband to dishonor. I thought out a plan of ruining Monk. I meant to get his place. I was mad at the time—clean mad. I found the big account book and changed his entries. I had a duplicate key made to the orchid house, and the night that anonymous letter was posted from London I stole the orchids and dropped them in the river. The person who posted my lying accusation, for which the Lord forgive me, never knew he was lending his hand to treachery; he thought it was just an advertisement I wanted sent, unbeknown to the master. The moment the deed was done I hated myself and cursed the hour my heart listened to the tempter's voice. Daily I went in terror of discovery. Then you came, and somehow I felt at once you guessed my secret. Now, Miss Mary, the garden in which I played with the devil's tools has been my death. Do what you think best, but, for the love of God, ask them all to keep the truth from Hettie. It would break her heart, poor lass, and she'll have enough to bear. Bless you, Miss Mary, and in mercy ask those I have wronged to forgive a miserable sinner. Miss Mary—I—I—am lost. Pray for me.

"MATTHEW VINES."

Scarcely had she read the words than Josephine rapped at her door, and turning the handle fruitlessly, cried:

"Mary—are you there?—are you there?"

Her voice came in broken gasps.

The key turned and Mary instantly admitted the trembling figure.

"Such awful news," said Mrs. Penreath. "A bough from the big chestnut tree at Rutherwyke fell upon poor Vines and killed him. Oliver was with him when he died. Only think what a tragedy! I really feel we ought to go back at once. Dear Oliver wrote instead of telegraphing, as he thought it would be less of a shock to my nerves. The gale has been terrible, no end of damage done and it is really too dreadful that unfortunate fellow being crushed to death in our grounds!"

She wrung her hands as the words came disjointedly from her lips.

Already she was half dragging Mary to their private salon, where Arrow once more reread the sad intelligence. He, too, had waited for the English letters, joining Josephine just as Miss Aquila hurried away to her room.

"It almost seems now," he said, "as if Vines knew some evil fate hung over him. Do you remember the footsteps he used to hear? It must have been a premonition, a warning of approaching death."

Arrow, usually so unsuperstitious, shuddered as he spoke.

Josephine hung still upon Mary's arm as if to draw strength from the calm, quiet presence.

"You had a letter, too," she said. "I believe you felt that there was something wrong; you went away the moment you saw the envelope. Oh! Mary, how awful it must be for Hettie Vines. She is such an excitable, highly strung woman. Oliver says he knelt at her side as the husband passed away. No money or skill could have saved him; it was a fatal internal injury."

Arrow handed his son's letter to Miss Aquila. To himself he said: "Thank God, it was not Mary!"

She did not look at the closely written sheets, but turned her eyes full upon Mr. and Mrs. Penreath.

"Yes, I have had a letter addressed to me in your son's handwriting, a last letter from Vines. It contains a dying confession from one who fell into bitter and terrible temptation. In your garden he planned to make Monk appear a dishonored man, in your garden the sinner sorrowed for sin, suffered in paralyzing fear and eventually met his death. Read his final words to me and try not to judge—try not to judge."

The repeated silence came from Mary's lips in earnest pleading, her eyes were eloquent with appeal. She watched the husband and wife reading together Matthew's feebly penciled lines, saw the color mount to Arrow's brow, flooding his face and neck as he realized the injustice done to an old and valued servant. Once he seemed inclined to throw the letter down, as though its painful sentences filled him with overpowering horror. Then he read quickly to the end, with an expression of cold disdain. But Mary's words rang in his ears, and he checked the harsh sentence he would otherwise have passed on the dead man's deed.

Josephine covered her face in silence and thought of the day when Monk first realized he had irrevocably lost his character and forfeited his home. She remembered his wild self-justification, his repeated assurance that it was the work of an enemy and Arrow's refusal to believe the assertion.

Strange that through Vines' unholy deed Mary came to dwell in their midst, shedding brightness and life, making the rough ways smooth. Mary came to plant in a sinner's heart the first seeds of repentance, to find Monk a situation in which he would again be trusted, to

restore Oliver to those who loved him and to give Arrow the most illuminating powerful inspiration of his life.

"What can we do?" said the artist, controlling the angry words which trembled on his lips. "How can we make up to Monk for all he has suffered?"

Josephine was at a loss to answer, instead she looked at Mary with dumb appeal.

The blue-clad figure came a step nearer, standing between husband and wife, speaking without hesitation, and addressing her words especially to Arrow.

"Of course you will instantly recall him. You can give him back the White Cottage and the post of head gardener. Tell him Providence has put into your hands a certain proof of his innocence, assure him absolutely on this point. He loves every inch of the grounds. He has never been really happy away. The night he came to see me I held out this hope of return. I told him I was only there for a short time, that truth would eventually prevail. I said I would try and reinstate him before the autumn."

"But you—you are not going away? We cannot let you leave us, Mary. We could not spare you under any conditions!" The exclamation broke incredulously from Josephine. "You must stay always. We want you—Rutherwyke wants you. Surely you know how dear you are to us?"

Mary smiled tenderly.

"If that be true," she said, "you must prove your love by not pressing me to stay. I have other work which calls me far from Abbotts Brooke, where my mission is over. A wrong has been righted, an injustice will end, and the picture is finished. There is nothing left for me to do."

A great silence fell. Arrow could not speak. He

dared not look at Mary. Instead he kept his eyes riveted on the bare boarded ground with its everlasting odor of soap and water. Josephine saw him bite his lips, she felt the tears gather beneath her lashes and steal down her delicately powdered cheeks.

"Perhaps we shall persuade you—even against your will, but, at any rate, I won't believe it yet," she declared, holding out her hand to Mary. "When we return to Rutherwyke we can talk of this again. Our time will be well occupied and we must face a trying situation and apologize to Monk. A dying man's wish (however deeply he has sinned) should be held sacred, so let us all resolve to keep the truth from Hettie Vines. We had better try and get her away at once to another part of the country, of course giving her a pension. The difficulty will be to stop Mrs. Monk from talking. Monk was always a strangely silent man, but when it comes to a woman——"

Josephine broke off in utter confusion; the problem seemed beyond her, and difficulties loomed on every side. Once again she looked appealingly at the one whose threatened absence filled her with a deepening sense of loss and approaching disaster.

Once more Mary spoke, now with increased conviction, as she remembered the overwhelming gratitude of Monk and his wife.

"When you see Mr. and Mrs. Monk on this painful subject," she said, "recall to their minds the fact that I trusted them in their darkest hour. Say it was my special wish—no, more than that, my command—no word should reach the widow's ears to make her suffering deeper. Tell them I ask this as a personal favor, as my reward; it is all they can do. In the eyes of the village their return to Rutherwyke Place will clear them abso-

lutely, for you can let it be known openly that you have sifted this matter to the bottom. Some few may possibly guess, but none, I fancy, would be wicked enough to send cruel messages to the bereaved woman in her new home. Hettie Vines is the last who will hear any slur on her dead husband's memory."

Mary's clear, decisive speech gave Josephine confidence. Already the first shock of Vines' death had abated, and she now looked calmly upon the tragic occurrence, lessened in sadness by its clearing of a great wrong.

"We might have continued to misjudge until the end of life," she said. "That is a truly awful thought."

Mary shook her head.

"Vines could not have held out much longer," she murmured with inward assurance. "The daily and hourly strain of his guilt, the increasing demands of conscience weighed heavily on his mind. I knew, before long, he would certainly make some kind of confession. Often when his eyes met mine, his voice failed; he could not speak. The steps he heard in the garden were the phantom footfalls of the wronged man brought home through the agency of a guilty conscience. Surely you must have seen how thin and haggard Vines became. He knew I suspected. I wanted him to speak of his own free will, but failing this I should eventually have questioned him, forcing him to tell the whole truth."

Arrow looked up quickly. For once Mary read disapproval in his face. "You never gave me a hint of all this. Why was I not informed?" he asked. "Surely I had a right to know if you were suspicious of Vines."

Mary's face wore a dreamy expression. Very softly she replied: "I had to work my own way. I was guided. I knew this day would come."

Instinctively a hush fell upon the man and woman. They exchanged one quick, furtive glance. As yet their partnership led to no discovery or solution of a problem deepening daily as the Ville de Marie visit slipped by.

"We certainly ought to go back to Rutherwyke," said Arrow. "I shall cross by to-night's boat."

Josephine looked startled. She thought of possibly returning the following morning, and now she had no idea of being left to travel alone.

"Is your work sufficiently advanced?" she queried. "What about the iron image?"

He moved to the window and looked across the wind-blown waves.

"I have taken six detailed sketches; I want nothing more. The sea will be rough enough this evening, but to-morrow it may be worse, and the boats might stop running. I shall not have an easy moment until I see Monk and put this cruel matter straight. Oliver is arranging Vines' funeral, but he may want my advice and help, though his heart is in the right place, and he will do everything that is kind and considerate."

Josephine joined her husband at the window and looked out across the troubled waters. The roar of the mighty breakers filled her with unspoken dread.

"Mary, what do you think about going too?" she asked. "Can we be ready to travel to-night? You see we have very little luggage. We could pack everything before *déjeuner*."

Miss Aquila's eyes kindled as she turned them toward the white-crested ocean. She was standing behind Josephine and her lips parted in a sudden smile, which neither husband nor wife saw.

"Yes," she answered, "let us go to-night. You will be wanted at Rutherwyke."

It was the final word. All three mutually agreed on speedy departure. The morning walk gave way to a swift filling of modest sized trunks. The humble life at Ville de Marie necessitated simple dressing, and for once Josephine had left England without her maid and a number of elegant costumes.

When *déjeuner* was announced Mary begged to be excused. She had no appetite and preferred to take a short walk alone.

Arrow waylaid her in the long corridor.

"You said you should visit the iron image once again before you left. You are going there now by yourself."

She bowed her head in assent.

"You have seen my sketches?" he queried.

"Yes."

"They are good," he continued emphatically. "They give the right impression. They express what we would say."

He used the word "we" in accents of triumph. In this work, at least, he was with Mary in thought, in desire, in high-souled ambition.

Miss Aquila could not deny the truth of his words.

"You have done well," she said—"well."

Her praise went to his head like wine.

"Yet you reward me so ill. You talk of leaving us; you torture me; you kill me. Even now you must go alone to the shrine. You have avoided me at my work; you are with Josephine always; and in the end you will cast us both off."

The words broke from his lips in a passionate whisper. He would have caught her wrist, but some invisible force chained his arm with unseen cords.

"Who are you? What are you?" he gasped, "woman or sphinx? Speak—Mary—speak."

In answer Josephine's voice sounded from the salon door.

"Arrow, *déjeuner* is waiting."

Mary turned away with a strange, piercing look which made him feel he had uttered blasphemy. Her light steps descended the staircase noiselessly. Alone, she passed unobserved into the open air, and, facing the high gale, walked, without effort, toward the shrine of Ville de Marie.

Though midday, it was an hour of solitude, for life's grosser aspect called men, women and children to their morning repast. Only those who desired the private ear of the iron image would seek her now, to ask a boon or crave a blessing. The high gale, whistling over the houses, breathed her name to the devout, for was she not their Star of Ocean, their Lady of the Sea?

With blank eyes she gazed upon the world from her niche in the blue-stained rock, offering her iron breast to those who cried, her iron heart to the weary and oppressed, while her hard brown feet were worn with burning kisses of reverent devotion.

CHAPTER XXVII

MARY'S GIRDLE

ALL was strangely still at the shrine. On each side of the roughly modeled statue overhanging rocks made a natural screen upon which sea-birds gathered confidently in white groups. The fishermen said they were the spirits of the lost, hovering near Notre Dame des Vertus to entreat her prayers. To-day Mary paused where the shadows concealed her, for a man knelt before the image with clasped hands and eyes raised adoringly to its weather-beaten face, his whole figure expressing the fervent reverence of a soul steeped in supplication or praise.

He was an old priest attached to the little chapel on the cliff, which so many characteristic emblems stamped as the special sanctuary of Ville de Marie's deep-sea toilers. Miniature ships, nets, shells, seaweed, coral and modeled fish all found a home within those sturdy, storm-proof walls. The priest's ascetic face bore out his reputation of learning and goodness. Madame Tellier spoke often of his splendid preaching and the eloquent flow of words with which he stirred the hearts of his congregation.

"He was fit," she would say, "to minister in one of their great towns. His talents were such, he should have been a cardinal, but Mother Church, bountiful in her gifts to the hallowed neighborhood, left them one of her brightest stars."

Evidently he had come to the shrine at the *déjeuner* hour, sure of being undisturbed.

He prayed aloud, and as his voice fell on Mary Aquila's ear, she trembled with nameless dread, while a pale horror blanched her cheeks. Each syllable rose clear, distinct, earnest, devout. Sometimes he unclasped his hands, holding them out as if in salutation, sometimes he beat his breast and bent so low that his forehead touched the stones on which he knelt.

Mary's parched lips followed the words without sound, followed them in trembling agony, while her eyes, dim with protesting tears, looked beyond the sea and sky to unknown vistas of light.

The priest's prayer rose in wild exaltation as with holy enthusiasm he apostrophized the blessed Mother of God:

"Hail, Mary, Venerable Treasure of the entire Church, Inextinguishable Lamp, Crown of Virginity, Scepter of the True Doctrine, Indissoluble Temple, Abode of Him who is Infinite—pray for us. Thou through whom the heaven exults, thou through whom evil spirits are put to flight, thou through whom the dead rise, thou through whom kings reign and churches are planted—pray for us.

"O Great Marie,

"O Greatest of Women,

"O Queen of the Angels,

"O Mistress of the Heavens,

"O Destruction of Eve's Disgrace,

"O Mother of the Orphans,

"O Breast of the Infants,

"O Queen of Life,

"O Ladder of Heaven,

"O Mother of the Heavenly and Earthly Church,

hear the petition of the poor, spurn not the wounds and groans of the miserable."

The litany ceased. The voice of salutation died on the rising wind, which moaned in fury over the cliffs. The priest rose, crossed himself and moved slowly away with lowered head, holding a devotional book folded between his palms. He passed so near Mary that her gown brushed his robe, yet apparently he was unaware of another presence. Only his lips parted suddenly in a smile, and through his veins crept some joyful sense of union with the spirit world.

"My prayer was heard," he told himself. "The Blissful Mother has sent a direct answer to my soul."

Mary Aquila stood without moving, for now a second worshiper stole on tiptoe to the shrine. This time a woman, young, pale, careworn, wrapped in a peasant's shawl, her head covered only by its weight of neatly coiled hair. She crept to the iron feet of the silent image, beating her hands upon her breast. Then she nervously twisted a thin gold wedding ring and looked down at a small heart suspended by a chain from her sunburned neck. Her tearless eyes were filled with an expression of eager supplication, her lips trembled as they whispered low, beseeching words.

"Sweet Lady Saint Marie," she gasped in faltering accents, "for that same great joy which thou hadst within thee when the Son of God took flesh and blood, grant, oh! grant my heart's desire. Have I not prayed full many a month? Have I not daily repeated a hundred Aves, alone, under the apple-trees in my far-off home? When I worked in the fields at harvest, thy dear name was ever upon my lips. Now I come on lonely pilgrimage to ask thee that blessing long withheld. For Jean's sake I plead, as well as for my own.

Give, oh! give us a son. He shall be consecrated to thy service, he shall be dedicated to pious work; he will be thine, not mine. We are taught that the power of prayer is great. Through many supplications, the barren may bear fruit and cries of childless women reach to the very portals of heaven. Hear, oh! rose without a thorn, say I am not accursed as a well without water and a tree without leaves."

She fumbled in her pocket for a small yellow candle, which she attempted to light, but at each effort the rude elements extinguished the flames.

Mary watching, saw the tears course down her tired face. From the dust on her clothes it was evident she had traveled far to reach the shrine of Ville de Marie.

Very pitiful she looked, kneeling there, vainly endeavoring to burn her tiny taper, despair at the failure of her efforts bringing from her lips a deep, unhindered sob. She was quite confident no eyes save those of the iron image gazed down upon her bent, pathetic figure.

The naked austerity of that rugged cliff, tinged by fitful sunlight, appeared symbolical of life. Could she, like the hard rock, never blossom into a fruitful plant? Must she plead in vain till age crept upon her, uttering its stern nay? She touched the side of the cliff with trembling fingers. This place of constant devotion and frequent pilgrimage seemed redolent of prayer, impregnated with a spirit of devotion. Whispers of praise breathed mysteriously through the tempestuous atmosphere, prayer wailed in the crashing breakers and the screech of sea-birds. To the stranger the very stones on which she knelt were mesmerized by the power of human supplication and cried aloud: "Oh, Blessed Maiden, Delight of Women, most noble and pure—intercede for us now in this vale of death."

Her endeavor to light the candle failed so often that eventually the young peasant wife gave way to despair, and casting her wax taper at the feet of the iron image, sobbed pitifully, rocking herself to and fro as if distracted, speaking her thoughts aloud.

"I would have trained him carefully in the love of our Lady," she murmured through her blinding tears. "I would never forget my promises. He should have grown to adore the Blessed Trinity, especially devoting himself to the Mother of God. But she closes her ear, she hides her face, she will never answer."

Even as the words broke in a sharp wail from those quivering lips the pilgrim saw a shadow fall across her kneeling figure. Tremulously she raised her eyes to face the other worshiper at the shrine. There, by the blue-stained rock, stood a blue-gowned figure with features of miraculous brightness and surpassing beauty. The radiant apparition looked down with deep compassion on the stricken woman, the sweetness of God's grace illuminating the tender maternal gaze. This unexpected vision of glorious womanhood imparted to the stranger a sensation of moving sunshine, of air, of light, of dazzling purity. With a heart paralyzed by joy the simple peasant gazed upon this loving face, exquisite in compassion, her breast heaving with wild emotion. Aloud she cried:

"Oh, my beloved Lady, my soul's light, my heart's bliss, by thus revealing thyself, thou hast brought me out of hell to Paradise. Lady of pity, lady of grace, lady of peace, who am I that thou shouldst deign to answer by thine own most sacred presence?"

Mary Aquila came nearer and stretched out her hand to raise the kneeling figure, shivering in an ecstasy of tremulous elation.

"I will pray for you," she whispered; "I will pray for you to the Virgin's Son, that He may grant your heart's desire. O woman, learn your error; go henceforth without fear to the Godhead; kneel at the Cross, call upon the Saviour, see Him with the eye of faith. When did the Master say, 'Come through My Mother'? When did He bid you cry to Mary? Tell me that! Tell me that, if you can!"

The voice shook in an agony of remonstrance. The brilliant eyes shone with tearless rebellion. Even the fierce gale lulled suddenly, hushed by the weighty significance to this burning question.

The peasant woman could not answer. She merely echoed as her brain reeled and the brilliant light around her dimmed:

"To the Son direct, to the Cross, to the Saviour; the Mother's wish, her word to me."

She stretched out trembling hands to Mary, grasping the silver girdle which hung around her body. The blue-gowned figure started back, as if to ward her off, coming forcibly into contact with the iron image, which instantly tottered and fell with a crash to the ground.

The pilgrim gave a piercing scream and covered her face with her hands. When she looked up she was alone, only the girdle of Mary Aquila lay within reach of her quivering fingers.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE PILGRIM'S STORY

"I WISH Mary would come in. She has been out such a long time," said Josephine.

"But our boxes are packed; there is nothing more to do," replied Arrow, trying to conceal a note of anxiety in his voice.

He was terribly afraid his hasty words in the corridor had offended Miss Aquila.

"The storm grows worse every moment," continued his wife, walking to the closed window, which the wind rattled viciously, while from under the door a sweeping draught made the small salon a place of discomfort. Suddenly she turned and spoke in a louder voice. "Oh! Arrow, come and look, something must have happened. Crowds of people are running in the same direction, an accident perhaps. Even that old disabled fisherman, who hardly ever moves from his nets, is hobbling toward the cliff. This morning's news has made me terribly nervous. Let us go down and make inquiries."

Together they sought Madame Tellier, who had just returned to the *pension* with a scarf over her head, brilliantly red cheeks and eyes glowing with strange excitement.

"Ah! it is true; it is veritably true," she cried, waving her arms. "Monsieur and madame have heard, of course?"

They proclaimed ignorance, eagerly awaiting information. They could see that Madame Tellier was in the throes of some great emotion. For a moment her breath went from her. She fanned herself violently with one hand, pressing the other to her side, supporting her ample form against the woodwork of the bureau.

Evidently she, too, had been running like those hurrying people on the beach. Now, regaining something of her usual calm, though her voice still shook, she spoke in her broken English, conscious that her manner had raised their expectations and eager not to disappoint her guests.

"Ah! my friends," she cried, growing familiar in her excitement, "we have been truly favored here in this place. Our glory will ring through France—from hill to valley, from north to south—and to-day's blessing shall be told to our children's children. I could weep for joy. See, the tears are on my cheek, for at first I feared it was too good to be true."

"Yes, yes, but what has happened?" cried Josephine, her eyes alight with curiosity as an eerie sensation crept through her veins.

"A miracle, madame, down there on the beach. Ah! do not smile! We know not the meaning. It may warn us the end of the world approaches, and we shall see the angels ascending and descending before the throne. It may predict the beginning of the big prosperity to our town, and that is what I hope. All the faithful will flock to that sacred spot, where the Holy Mother stood in blinding light. I shall yet see the great families coming to my door, I shall build on rooms, I shall be rich—rich——"

Josephine was growing impatient.

"Please explain," she said in a tone of mild severity.

"You forget you have not yet told us the nature of the miracle."

Madame Tellier pulled herself together with an effort, wiped her streaming brow and courtesied apologetically.

"Pardon, monsieur et madame, my tongue it ran away, like my head, which is quite lost. Such a big sensation comes but once in a lifetime and scatters senses. Only to think—only to think, here at Ville de Marie, that a miraculous appearance should be granted of our Divine Lady herself. She, our star, our special light, now, while the waves rise, revealed her glorious person to a humble woman, who cried for ghostly comfort. The blessed lips spoke as if music came from heaven, and so overwhelming was the majesty of the real presence that the iron image fell face downward to the ground. You can go and see it for yourselves lying at the foot of the cliff. The priest has been sent for, and all the town gathers on the spot. It is believed the sick may be healed as at Lourdes, since the Divine Mother has graciously shown herself in mercy to a simple-hearted pilgrim."

Arrow listened without a word, while Josephine broke in with constant exclamations.

"How can the pilgrim who saw the vision prove her words?" she asked, trying to conceal her incredulous attitude from Madame Tellier. "She may not speak the truth; you know how easily people are deceived."

The proprietress smiled confidently.

"The woman gives us proof of what she saw, for the beauteous figure, bathed in light, handed her a sanctified girdle, a relic to keep forever—the girdle of our Lady. This peasant came to ask a child of the blessed Mother, and now she has received undoubtedly an answer to her prayer. Similar relics are sent to women in their hour

of pain for safety and protection; the Virgin left it for a sign which cannot be misunderstood."

Josephine listened with lowered eyes. Already Arrow was eager to start for the scene of the miraculous vision. He wanted to view the iron image face downward on the earth, to note the general attitude of the people, and, above all, to try and find Mary.

His wife feared the fury of the gale, for to her the wind was a deadly enemy, rude, rough, unstable.

"I could not walk against this tempest," she said. "I must save my strength for to-night's journey. You go and bring me word. Evidently the whole village is there at the shrine. See, the people are still running."

She watched Arrow pass through the *pension* yard, where small tables stood in groups for outdoor refreshment. He moved quickly, with elastic step, and she wondered vaguely what strange sights he would witness. She could picture the excitable foreign temperament giving way to tears of joy, to wild words and lavish gesticulation. How they would throng to gaze upon the fallen image, to learn each detail of the pilgrim's story, already repeated with lavish exaggeration. As she turned to retrace her steps up the winding stairs she caught Madame Tellier's eyes fixed upon her with a certain pitying solicitude, while the friendly voice queried: "Madame did not care to go with monsieur?"

Mrs. Penreath answered truly:

"The wind upsets my nerves. I dislike this rough weather particularly."

The proprietress sighed, then ventured on a remark which in cold blood would never have passed her lips.

"If the love of our Lady were in your heart, you would not think of the *mauvais temps;* but it has not pleased the Almighty to show madame the light."

Josephine flushed slightly. It hurt her sensitive spirit that this woman should look upon her as an unawakened soul.

"You see, I am not a Catholic," she replied, rearing her head proudly, "and that makes all the difference."

Madame Tellier nodded sadly and followed the retreating figure with her eyes.

"Holy Mother!" she murmured, "if I have offended so good a customer! The English come but little here, and none with such a generous purse as this heretic of the private salon."

Josephine, though outwardly calm, had inwardly caught the spirit of Ville de Marie's wild enthusiasm, and longed for Arrow's return to hear all details of these strange happenings.

She wondered if the image were injured in the fall, feeling glad her husband had completed his sketches before the accident occurred.

As she re-entered the salon her eyes fell upon Mary, standing by the window in an attitude of meditation. Mrs. Penreath went quickly to her side.

"I am so very glad you have come in," she cried. "I did not like the idea of your being alone in that fanatical crowd. Of course, you heard this story of a vision at the shrine. All the people have gone quite mad. If an earthquake had occurred they could not appear more excited. No doubt the wind blew the iron image down."

Mary bowed her head assentingly. How strangely silent she appeared!

Suddenly an unspoken suspicion leaped to Josephine's mind. With every nerve quivering, she looked for the girdle on the plain blue dress; it was no longer there.

CHAPTER XXIX

GOOD-NIGHT

THE Penreaths' departure from Ville de Marie proved a very quiet affair. Everybody was utterly engrossed by the burning subject of the day, and Madame Tellier alone wished the travelers *bon voyage*. Even the *pension* servants forgot to wait about for tips and had to be sought by Arrow, who noted they took little interest in the proffered money.

The peasant's words, the subsequent utterances of the priest, the healing power of the girdle formed the sole topics of conversation. The sacred gift had been carried immediately to the sick, that their lips might impress a kiss of reverent devotion, while later it was also on view in the priest's house. A great wave of fanatical enthusiasm spread like fire through the little fishing village; the Holy Mother was their own, and the light of God shone in their happy faces.

Arrow declared he would never forget the scenes witnessed on the beach. Impossible to break through the seething mass of humanity swarming round the prostrate image. In order to view the spot, strong men fought their way through groups of women, thrusting them aside with scant courtesy and knocking down the children obstructing their path. It was a good-natured fight, though a desperate one, for all eyes burned to behold the hallowed ground where the vision had ap-

peared—to gain, if possible, some lasting good from contact with the stones on which the divine feet of the Virgin rested. Arrow watched, fascinated, spellbound. Then suddenly the pushing, eager forms fell back, and the whole crowd knelt in absolute silence, intensified by the previous babble of high-pitched voices. Arrow had expected this awed hush to proclaim the advent of the priest, and studied the unusual scene, so vital, earnest and full of significance, with added interest, as if indeed he were watching some weirdly realistic play.

But no, the man of God was only then starting from his chapel on the cliff, where he had been receiving confessions when the summons came. The new arrival for whom the last congregation made way was a woman, with blanched face and staring eyes, carrying a bundle in her arms. Unhindered she passed to where Notre Dame des Vertus lay face downward on the beach, accompanied by the favored pilgrim, holding her charmed girdle. She pointed out, with trembling hand, the exact spot where the radiant apparition materialized, whispering words Arrow could not catch to the bearer of the burden.

A moment later and the pitiful bundle lay uncovered on the sun-bleached stones, revealing the form of a dead child. Arrow gazed a moment on the fair white features of a little five-year-old girl, with tumbled curls and limp, lifeless hands like fallen snowflakes stretched upon the beach now so familiar to his eye. He turned away, sickened, and as he passed through the crowd he heard a voice saying:

"*La pauvre mère!* She thought to bring her child back to life. She believed the little one would rise from the dead."

This painful sight had so startled Arrow, he was glad

to shake the dust of Ville de Marie from his feet, welcoming the long drive to a distant harbor, the prospect of the sea-voyage and the return to English shores.

He had forgotten to telegraph early to secure a deck cabin for Josephine and Miss Aquila and a berth below for himself, where he prophesied he would fall asleep, however rough the crossing.

"Nothing disturbs my rest," he declared, "and I should judge from our journey over, you are equally fortunate."

He addressed this remark to Mary as they stepped on board.

"Yes," she replied with sudden enthusiasm, "I love the sea. I mean to stay out on deck, for such a night as this should not be missed. The sight of the waves will be splendid; I shall watch them at least for the first hour."

Arrow's eyes kindled, as her words conjured up the mighty picture of a storm-tossed sea.

"Splendid!" he echoed, registering a vow that he too would taste the wild charms of the midnight ocean—at Mary's side.

When Josephine reached her cabin her past fears suddenly faded. Mary stood beside her as she lay down in the berth; Mary's voice whispered reassuring words. Then, as Josephine's head rested gladly on the pillows, a kind hand stroked her forehead with magnetic touch, and sleep peacefully descended like a garment, bringing dreams of the happy Ville de Marie days.

For some time Miss Aquila sat by the silent figure. She was not surprised Josephine's lips smiled and her face wore an expression of contented ease. The gentle influence had worked a spell which never failed.

"Good-night," whispered Mary lovingly. "Good-night, Josephine."

The words reached the unconscious woman in some far-off slumberland, for she stirred slightly, with a happy little sigh, while her eyelids quivered, as if in willing response to the familiar words.

Mary bent to kiss her brow. Even as the kiss fell, the lines on Josephine's forehead vanished, her face became serene and calm as a child cradled in a mother's arms.

"Good-night," came the whisper once again, "good-night forever."

With noiseless tread Mary opened the door and stepped out upon the wave-swept deck.

Simultaneously a man, wearing a long rain-proof coat, joined her.

"You must not stay out here," said Arrow in a voice of concern, "for I am told it will be a very nasty crossing, and we have not seen the worst yet. These huge waves break over the boat with such power that it would be quite possible to end with something worse than a wetting."

Mary stood against the cabin, holding the handle tightly.

"You mean," she said, "their force might sweep us away."

Arrow caught at a rail to steady himself as he replied:

"Yes, I mean that."

Mary showed no trace of fear nor did she appear anxious to return to the cabin.

"Is Josephine asleep?" he asked, speaking low into her ear, with a glance at the closed door.

"Yes. I sat beside her for a few moments and she

dozed off. Sometimes I am successful in helping people to rest."

Arrow drew a step nearer. His feet were wringing wet, yet this precious moment with Mary was worth some personal discomfort.

"I believe you can mesmerize," he said. "I have thought it more than once in the studio."

She smiled and made no answer for a moment. Then she murmured tenderly: "It was just influence, because I love Josephine."

As Arrow listened he fancied he had never heard so human a note in the voice which reminded him of the Gabriel bell.

"I am glad you love her," he said. "It gives me hope that you will stay at Rutherwyke. It is not possible that we could let you go. Don't you realize what your presence means to us? It has been such a goodly fellowship, so full of inspiration, so rich with example. You remember telling me, the day we reached Ville de Marie, that I must not be surprised at anything. Well, I tried to follow out your words, but I found the task difficult. Have you any fresh surprises in store? I merely ask this one question, though I should like to press so many upon you. Such countless 'whys' crowd to my mind, only I won't utter them, because I know they would displease you. Sometimes I think you like to be incomprehensible."

Mary turned a pair of searching eyes upon him, and though he had caught their light on canvas, he hardly knew them now.

"Oh! no," she said emphatically, "but I must obey another Will, and I could never make you understand; you must not try, it is not meant. You were born to great works; be contented with your own life, and leave

me to order mine. You might try to fathom my sorrow, but there is a depth of woe the human heart cannot pierce in sympathy; it must experience, it must live the pain and drink the cup. Think of this when your picture goes forth to the world. I have indeed another surprise in store, but when it comes, do not let it trouble you. Say to yourself: 'She loved us both with an entirely disinterested spiritual love.' If a wish can bring a blessing, Arrow Penreath, I wish you prosperity."

She placed her thin white hands in his, and they were cold as the hands of death. All warmth of human passion drifted from the man's heart as that icy clasp froze his veins.

"Mary!" he gasped, "Mary!"

He could frame no other word. The chill of a great dread gripped his soul. Even as he spoke a wave broke over the deck, all but sweeping them from their feet.

"Go," she whispered—"go. It is not safe to remain."

She turned as if to re-enter Josephine's cabin. Reluctantly Arrow obeyed; he dared not trust himself to look again into those dear eyes.

"Sleep well," he whispered brokenly. "God bless you for your gentle words and the kindly wish so good to remember. I shall never forget that you loved us *both*."

As he passed with difficulty to the gangway he pictured the scene in which Mary Aquila's Madonna-like face had been mistaken by a simple French peasant for a vision of the Virgin at Ville de Marie's shrine.

"Why," he asked himself, "had Mary concealed the fact? Surely she must know that he and Josephine guessed the truth."

Humility, perhaps, and a shrinking shame that such

things should be, a horror of naming the unasked worship her beauty kindled.

He thought, as he lay down, of the Virgin Mother dear to French sailors, who invoked her as their guide, their anchor, their port of refuge, their haven in shipwreck, and the Mary in the picture at Rutherwyke, breathing her protest with voiceless eloquence.

"Perhaps the seamen are praying to her now," he murmured as he closed his eyes, "calling upon their brilliant Ocean Star, instead of seeking the true divinity —the Man of Sorrows, the patient Christ—who trod the waves and calmed them with those three short words, 'Peace, be still.' "

* * * * * * * *

The deck was entirely deserted by passengers and the great, grand waves rose higher and higher, mighty, magnificent—merciless in their strength.

Mary stole to the far end of the boat with light step, untouched by the fury of the wind, even as the men of God walked through the fiery furnace of old. Her blue cloak hung from her shoulders, and not a fold of her clothing, not a hair of her head stirred in the boisterous gale.

She stood for a while watching the force of the storm, with a smile on her lips. Then a vast wave suddenly towered above her head. As it rose she lifted her hands, making the sign of the cross. A rush of water swept the deck where the blue gowned figure stood, and a moment later a sudden lull fell across the phosphorescent sea.

Far away a soft voice chanted a low "Good-night"—the voice of Mary Aquila.

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